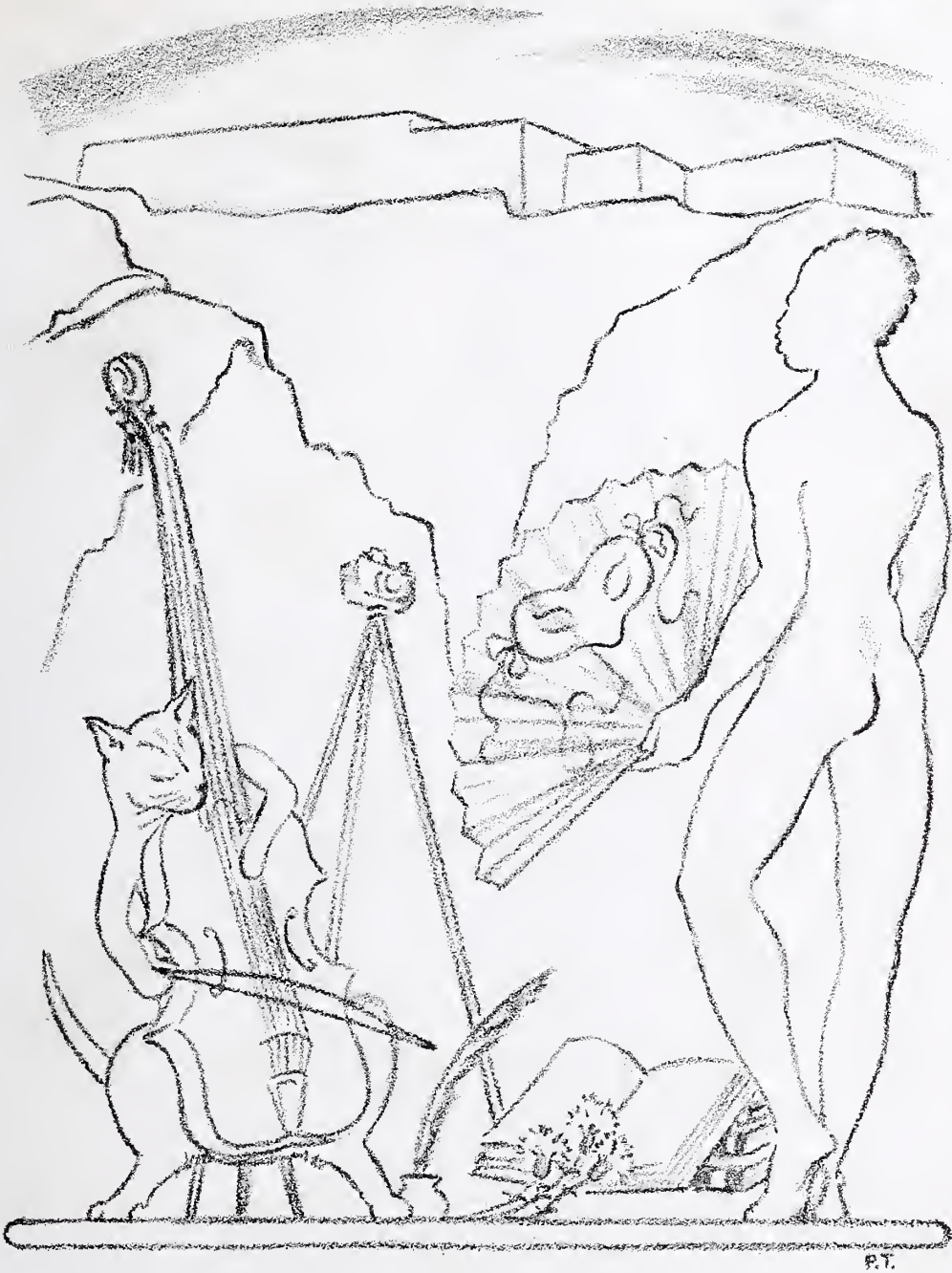


Dance Index



P.T.

EX LIBRIS
CARL VAN VECHTEN



Dance Index

a new magazine devoted to dancing

Editors

BAIRD HASTINGS
LINCOLN KIRSTEIN
PAUL MAGRIEL

Comment

There is nothing new at all about the fact that Carl Van Vechten — along with his many-sided interest in cats, Harlem, music, Spain, theatre, photography and belles lettres — is devoted to the dance. At every important première he is to be found as near the front row as feasible, he spends a great deal of his time and energy making portraits of the dancers who interest him most (many of which are to be shown in his one-man show at the Museum of the City of New York beginning November 17), and at least half a dozen of his books contain essays on dancing or dancers or both.

There is something new, however, about the realization that he has a distinguished record of accomplishment as a working dance critic, and that in the most formative period of America's dance taste. During the years when Pavlova and Mordkin were introducing Russian ballet to New York, when Isadora Duncan was experimenting with the *Liebestod*, when Maud Allan was presenting her Salome for the first time to local consumers, he was associate music editor of the *New York Times* and to him fell virtually all its dance assignments.

The reviews he then wrote, now mouldering away in the *Times* "morgue," unsigned, neglected even by himself, form a body of criticism that is an uncommonly valuable contribution to America's literature in that field. Though they were written thirty years ago, their judgments are as sound as they ever were and the prescience they exhibit in an art in which America (in common with most of the rest of the world) was abysmally illiterate bespeaks a remarkably sensitive and forward-looking mind. That they played a major part in the creation of public taste cannot be gainsaid.

It would be a delight to be able to reprint all the newspaper articles — interviews with dancers, news stories and the like, as well as reviews — but that is manifestly impossible. The thirteen reviews from the *Times* that are here reprinted for the first time have been selected because of the importance of the events they chronicle and because taken together they give such a vivid insight into the state of the dance in one of its most vital periods. The fourteenth piece is a bit of pertinent editorial comment written for the *Evening Globe*. Since all these articles were unsigned according to the custom of those days, Van Vechten often availed himself of the opportunity to turn out a little piece on the side for his friend, Pitts Sanborn, the *Globe's* music editor.

The second and larger part of the material here presented consists of essays and excerpts from various of his published writings. These pieces, to be sure, were composed with greater leisure and more opportunity for second thought. What they have to say, therefore, is naturally better organized and sometimes phrased with more felicity. The newspaper reviews, however, are characterized by the quick and accurate first judgments of an artist who happened also to be an excellent newspaper man, and both sets of pieces as a unit constitute as brilliant a critical document as one is likely to find.

Mr. Van Vechten has been wonderfully cooperative in the preparation of this material, suggesting a few omissions and an occasional inclusion, changing only an infrequent word here and there, and being in general more than a little surprised that those of us who have worked with these writings should put such a very high estimate upon them.

JOHN MARTIN

Cover: Mr. Van Vechten's book plate designed by Prentiss Taylor.

Opposite: Anna Pavlova in *Pavillon d'Armide*, *Don Quixote*, and *California Poppy*. (© Mishkin.), *La Fille Mal Gardée*.

Subscription: 25c a copy; \$2.50 by the year. (Triple issue 75c.)

Copyright 1942, Dance Index — Ballet Caravan, Inc. 637 Madison Avenue, New York City.

Vol. I. Nos. 9, 10, 11. September-October-November 1942.

The Dance Criticisms of Carl Van Vechten

Part 1 = Reviews written for the New York Times

November 10, 1909

Miss Isadora Duncan, who has evolved a style of choreographic art which corresponds in a measure at least — according to a comparison with the figures on ancient vases — with the dances of the ancient Greeks, made her reappearance in New York last evening at the Metropolitan Opera House, assisted by Walter Damrosch and the New York Symphony Orchestra.

The programme stated that Miss Duncan would dance to the ballets and choruses of Gluck's *Iphigénie en Aulide*. Most of her dances were accomplished to such aid, but at least one of them, a Chorus of Priestesses, was taken from *Iphigénie en Tauride*, and its original purpose and signification were greatly distorted by the dancer. It is a number which was never designed for dancing, and to any one who has heard it in its proper place in the opera it must seem more or less of a sacrilege to have it put to such purpose.

There can be no possible objection, however, to Miss Duncan's appropriating the ballet numbers from the Gluck operas for her particular purpose. It is a well known fact that Gluck composed many of his ballets because they were demanded by the audiences of his time rather than by the exigencies of his operas. It is also quite as true that the list of them includes much that is best of the Gluck music.

They are particularly fitted in their nobility and lack of sensuousness to accompany the moods and poses which Miss Duncan portrays in her dances. She is at her best in dances which depict life and gaiety and motion. In this she is always sure of communicating her meaning to an audience. The Bacchanale which ended the formal programme ex-

hibited her finest talents. The play of the arms in the moderato and allegro in which the Maidens of Chalkis play at ball and knuckle bones by the seashore was also one of the effective bits.

The dances last night were in nowise different from those in which Miss Duncan has appeared in past seasons in this country and Europe, and her draperies were the same beautiful Greek arrangements. Repetitions of several of the dances were demanded by the large audience, and at the end of the programme Miss Duncan added several extra numbers concluding with *The Beautiful Blue Danube waltz*.

November 17, 1909

Miss Isadora Duncan again appeared at the Metropolitan Opera House yesterday afternoon and danced for the first time this season to Beethoven's A major symphony, which was played by the New York Symphony Orchestra, with Walter Damrosch conducting. It is quite within the province of the recorder of musical affairs to protest against this perverted use of the Seventh Symphony, a purpose which Beethoven certainly never had in mind when he wrote it. Because Wagner dubbed it the "apotheosis of the dance" is not sufficient reason why it should be danced to.

However, if one takes it for granted that Miss Duncan has a right to perform her dances to whatever music she chooses, there is no doubt of the high effect she achieves. Seldom has she been more poetical, more vivid in her expression of joy, more plastic in her poses, more rhythmical in her effects than she was yesterday. Wagner's title for the symphony might very properly be applied to Miss Duncan. As usual, she was most effective in the

dances which require decisive movement. One of the wildest of her dances she closed with arms outstretched and head thrown back almost out of sight until she resembled the headless Nike of Samothrace.

The orchestra played Tschaiowsky's *Marche Slave*, a pantomime from Mozart's ballet music to *Les Petits Riens*, and a Beethoven *Polonaise* for the second part of the programme and then Miss Duncan danced five Chopin numbers. The audience was large and enthusiastic.

December 1, 1909

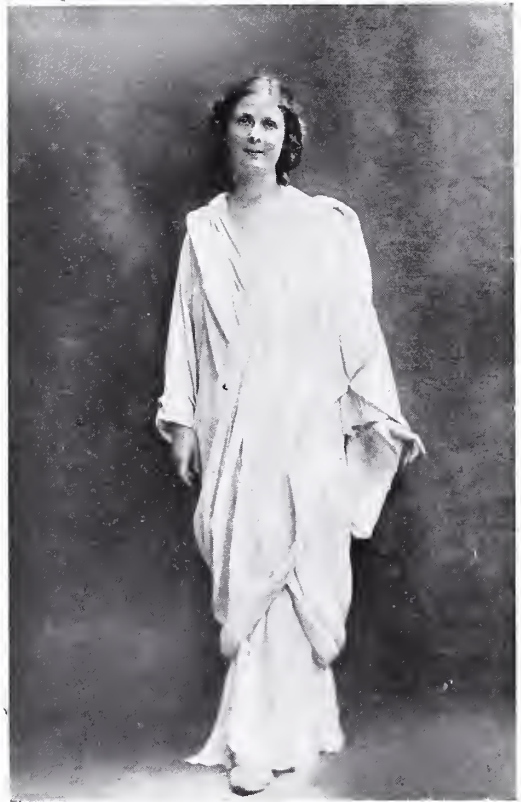
Miss Loie Fuller, known in Paris as La Loie, returned to dance in New York yesterday at the Metropolitan Opera House after several years' absence. Miss Fuller, it will be remembered, invented the serpentine dance, and devised light effects to simulate fire and other natural phenomena. It was in dances which employed manifold draperies and numberless colored lights that the dancer was formerly seen here. Since then, however, Isadora Duncan and Maud Allan have revived the Greek dance, at least their own ideas of the Greek dance, and Miss Fuller's performance yesterday afternoon included examples of these later-day conceptions as well as many of her own earlier creations.

For the first time that she has been seen here she was surrounded by a group of dancers, a complete ballet, in fact. Added to these were several solo dancers, many of whom have achieved Continental fame quite independently of Miss Fuller, but who have joined her company for this American tour. The programme, therefore, presented a varied aspect.

Miss Fuller and her muses were seen at the beginning in an interpretation of the Bach-Gounod *Ave Maria*. Following this *Orchidée*, an American girl, who is young and beautiful, danced to a prelude of Chopin in Greek costume and with bare legs. *Orchidée* was later seen in a *Diana Dance*, which was most effective, and an interpretation of Mozart's *Turkish March*.

Mme. Thamara de Swirsky, a Russian dancer with quite another style but the same sort of costume, followed. Mme. de Swirsky makes a more sensuous appeal than most dancers of the classic type. Miss Irene Sanden, a German girl, who is said to find her chief joy in dancing waltzes, followed in a waltz of Rubinstein and Strauss's *Roses from the South*.

The second part of the programme was in many ways the best half of the afternoon's entertainment.



Isadora Duncan (1906)

Miss Rita Sacchetto, who is well known in Europe, danced a dance of madness in Chopin's *Tarantelle*. The explanation of this dance is that a maiden who has been stung by a deadly spider can save her life only by mad dancing. The tempo increases with such intensity that the dancer breaks down, completely exhausted, only to rise again to intensified emotion.

Miss Sacchetto achieved a remarkably novel effect in this dance and succeeded in working the audience up to a high degree of enthusiasm. Many doubtless wished that they could see her perform her Spanish dances.

Miss Gertrude Van Axen, who shared this portion of the programme with Miss Sacchetto, was seen in Greek dances, into the scheme of which she fitted perfectly. Her figure is beautifully modeled and she is marvelously plastic.

The entertainment concluded with the Ballet of Light, in which the older ideas of Miss Fuller were



incorporated and manifolded. If you have seen Miss Fuller perform her fire dance, in which the draperies take on the color and texture of flames, conceive of it as executed by thirty young women at once and you will have a picture of the Ballet of Light. Other dances of Miss Fuller's were manifolded in this same way, and the programme closed with the appearance of Miss Fuller herself.

A very large audience, which included many notable people, was in attendance, and the entertainment seemed to meet with approval. The Metropolitan Opera House orchestra, under the direction of Max Bendix, furnished the music.

January 21, 1910

Miss Maud Allan, an American girl, who has won no inconsiderable amount of fame in Europe and in England with her dances, made her initial appearance before a New York audience yesterday afternoon in Carnegie Hall. A large and very fashionable gathering greeted the dancer. In fact it has been a long time since so many automobiles have been lined up in front of this staid concert hall. Apparently all of the seats were filled and many were standing at the back. It was an enthusiastic audience, too, and Miss Allan was forced to repeat several of the dances which particularly caught the public fancy.

Most of Miss Allan's European reputation rests on a dance which she has called *A Vision of*

(Above) Orchidée. (Below) Loie Fuller (right foreground) Orchidée (center) and group in Prince Paul Troubetzkoy's garden (Paris : 1909)



Salome, which introduces light and scenic effects, and which was one of the earliest symptoms of the later *Salome* craze which swept rapidly down from Germany across the Atlantic to New York, where it is just beginning to be brushed away.

It was not in this dance, however, that Miss Allan chose to make her first American appearance. Instead she elected to appear in another sort of dance with which New York is at present very familiar, thanks to Miss Isadora Duncan, the group of dancers which Miss Loie Fuller brought over, and finally to the ballet in Gluck's *Orfeo* as it is danced at present on the Metropolitan Opera House stage.

These dances, accomplished to music written by the great composers — it will be remembered that Miss Duncan even went so far as to use Beethoven's Seventh Symphony — exploit the dancer in poses presumably inspired by a study of Greek vases. Bare-limbed and scantily draped in filmy gauzes, diaphanous in texture and unvivid in color, she floats from one pose to the next, emphasizing the plastic transitions with waving arms and raised legs and sundry poses of the head.

Miss Allan in spirit and in the nature of her dances resembles her predecessors. However, she is more beautiful in face and figure than some of them, and she has a grace, a picturesque personal quality, which is all her own. Yesterday the stage of Carnegie Hall was hung in green draperies and the lights but dimly indicated pale colors. The orchestra was the Russian Symphony Society, under the direction of Modest Altschuler.

It has sometimes been complained of in these columns that dancers take great liberties in dancing to music which was never intended for that purpose. However, Miss Allan in her programme yesterday scarcely transcended the bounds of good taste in this direction. She danced to Rubinstein's *Melody in F*, Mendelssohn's *Spring Song*, two mazurkas and a valse of Chopin, Grieg's *Peer Gynt* suite, the *Funeral March* from Chopin's B flat minor sonata, and Rubinstein's *Valse Caprice*.

January 30, 1910

Miss Maud Allan, having launched herself at a previous New York matinee as a classical dancer, yesterday afternoon at Carnegie Hall presented herself in *The Vision of Salome*, the dance which made her name well known in London. This dance was devised by Miss Allan at the period when Oscar Wilde's play, Richard Strauss's music drama, and Franz von Stuck's pictures were creating the stir in Germany that they shortly afterward created in

America. There is no record of Miss Allan having received any suitable recognition of her talents at that time, however. A little later, to be exact, in May 1907, she crossed the border line and appeared in Paris.

The Théâtre des Variétés was celebrating its one hundredth anniversary with a revue, much more splendid than those which are given in the ordinary Parisian music halls. This revue was nearing its seventieth performance, when the first rendering of Strauss's music drama *Salome*, in Paris, was announced at the Théâtre du Chatelet for May 8. Manager Samuel of the Variétés saw his chance. He brought out Miss Allan in the *Vision de Salome* on the 7th. Her appearance at this theatre caused some discussion, but no sensation. That was reserved for her London appearance, which occurred some months later at the Palace Theatre. Since her début at this London music hall, Miss Allan's name has steadily grown in fame. For over a year in fact, she continued to do her nightly characterization of *Salome* in London.

Yesterday's representation differed in no marked respect from that of three years ago, and the stage setting was the same she had used in London. It is



Maud Allan (ca. 1909)



Maud Allan as *Salome* (New York : 1910)

true that in Paris she had caressed the severed head of John the Baptist. Yesterday the head itself was left to the imagination but none of the caressing was. However, New York has seen so many dances of this sort by now that there were no exclamations of shocked surprise, no one fainted, and at the end there was no very definite applause.

Miss Allan's version of *Salome* presents a young girl who, having danced before Herod and asked for the head of John at the command of her mother, goes through the scene again in a dream. The stage is set to represent a garden of the palace, and in this garden Miss Allan yesterday executed steps and curved her body in contortions which are now conventionally supposed to suggest *Salome*.

Earlier in the afternoon Miss Allan danced to the *Peer Gynt* suite, a sarabande and gavotte of Bach's; Mendelssohn's *Spring Song*, and Strauss's *Blue Danube*. All of these dances were accomplished in the prevalent classical manner and evoked much applause. The quality which Miss Allan possesses to

a greater degree than her predecessors is a rhythmic sense.

The Russian Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of Modest Altschuler, played the accompaniments, and several other numbers. It should be appended for the sake of record that *The Vision of Salome* was not accomplished to the dance music from Strauss's music drama, but to an "arrangement" possibly of Eastern airs, by Marcel Remy.

March 1, 1910

More than two-thirds of the boxes at the Metropolitan Opera House were still filled with their occupants at half after 12 last night. It was not a performance of *Götterdämmerung* without cuts that kept a fashionable Monday night audience in its seats, but the American début of Anna Pavlowa, the Russian dancer from the Imperial Opera in St. Petersburg. Mme. Pavlowa appeared in a revival of *Coppélia*, which was given at the Metropolitan for the first time since the season of 1904-5. As this was preceded by a performance of *Il'crther*, the ballet did not commence until after 11, and it was nearly 1 before it was finished.

However, Mme. Pavlowa easily held most of her audience. It is safe to say that such dancing has not been seen on the local stage during the present generation. If Pavlowa were a regular member of the Metropolitan Opera Company it would also be safe to prophecy a revival of favor for the classic ballet.

The little dancer is lithe and exquisitely formed. When she first appeared just after the curtain rose there was a dead silence. She received no welcome. She wore the conventional ballet dress and her dark hair was bound back with a blue band.

After the first waltz, which immediately follows her entrance, the audience burst into vociferous applause, which was thereafter repeated at every possible opportunity. Pavlowa received an ovation of the sort which is seldom given to anybody at this theater.

And her dancing deserved it. To begin with, her technique is of a sort to dazzle the eye. The most difficult tricks of the art of the dancer she executed with supreme ease. She even went further. There were gasps of astonishment and bursts of applause after several of her remarkable feats, all of which were accomplished with the greatest ease and lightness.

Grace, a certain sensuous charm, and a decided sense of humor are other qualities which she possesses. In fact, it would be difficult to conceive a

dancer who so nearly realizes the ideal of this sort of dancing.

In the first act she was assisted at times by Mikail Mordkin, who also comes from St. Petersburg, and who is only second to Pavlowa as a remarkable dancer. Their pas de deux near the end of the act was perhaps the best-liked bit of the evening. It was in the second act in her impersonation of the doll that Pavlowa disclosed her charming sense of humor.

At this time it is impossible to write any more about this dancer, but there is no doubt that she will prove a great attraction while she remains in New York.

March 2, 1910

The second appearance at the Metropolitan Opera House of the two Russian dancers, Anna Pavlowa and Mikail Mordkin, was undoubtedly the feature of the performance which was given there last night for the benefit of the pension and endowment fund of that institution. The auditorium was packed for the occasion, and the total receipts were somewhere in the neighborhood of \$15,000.

Very late in the evening before these two dancers had appeared in Delibes's ballet *Coppélia*. Last night they appeared alone without the assistance of the somewhat ragged corps de ballet of the Metropolitan Opera House in two divertissements, which were so entirely different from anything they had done in *Coppélia* that any one who had seen their previous performance would have had difficulty in recognizing them.

Such dancing has not been seen in New York in recent years, and last night's audience manifested its feeling as heartily as had that of Monday evening.

Early in the evening the curtains parted on a woodland scene which left a large open space on the stage. The orchestra played an adagio of Bleichmann's. First Mordkin darted on to the scene dressed as a savage. Pavlowa followed him. The two danced together and then alone. Mordkin whirled for long seconds on one foot, with the other foot pointed at right angles from his body. He did another dance, in which he shot arrows from a huge bow behind his shoulder. The celerity, the grace, the rhythm of his terpsichorean feats were indescribable in their effect.

Pavlowa twirled on her toes. With her left toe pointed out behind her, maintaining her body poised to form a straight line with it, she leapt backward step by step on her right foot. She swooped into the air like a bird and floated down. She never dropped. At times she seemed to defy



Mikail Mordkin (New York : 1910)

the laws of gravitation. The divertissement ended with Pavlowa, supported by Mordkin, flying through the air, circling his body around and around. The curtain fell. The applause was deafening. Again and again the two were called before the footlights.

Later in the evening the two danced again to music from a ballet of Glazunow's. This special divertissement was called *Autumn*. The music was gay and furious in its rhythm. The two in Greek draperies dashed about the stage, veiled in a background of floating gauze. The music became wilder and wilder, and wilder and wilder grew the pace of the two. The Bacchanalian finale, in which Pavlowa was finally swept to the earth, held the audience in tense silence for a moment after it was over, and then the applause broke out again. The curtain calls after this dance were innumerable.

March 18, 1910

Mlle. Pavlowa and Mr. Mordkin introduced two new dances to this public at The New Theatre yesterday afternoon. Both of the new dances were better suited to the smaller stage of that theatre



Pavlova and Mordkin : *Bacchanal* (New York : 1910)

than *Coppélia*. In the first Pavlova danced alone to Saint-Saëns's *Le Cygne*, played on the solo violin with a harp accompaniment. This dancer's poetic conception of the swan was an achievement of the highest order of imagination. It is the most exquisite specimen of her art which she has yet given to this public.

Immediately after, to the accompaniment of Chopin's C sharp major waltz, played on the piano-forte, Mordkin and Pavlova danced a pas de deux in early nineteenth century costumes. This was as beautiful in its way as the other dance. The two will be repeated to-night at the New Theatre.

June 29, 1910

The Metropolitan Opera House is to have a ballet composed entirely of American girls inside of two years. Mme. Cavallazzi, the head of the ballet school of that institution, said so yesterday at the exercises

terminating the first year of the school. Twenty-four girls, most of them just 16 years old, showed that it is not only Italians and French and Russians who can stand on their toes and pirouette.

"Mr. Gatti-Casazza came to me just before he sailed," said Mme. Cavallazzi, "and engaged ten of my girls after seeing them dance. He is only bringing eighteen girls from Europe this year, and next season the ballet will almost surely be made up entirely of American girls. Mr. Dippel came to me yesterday for girls for his Chicago opera company. I had none ready then which were not promised, but I'll have more in the Fall.

"I am greatly pleased with the success of my school, and I am sure that it will be even more of a success when I have had the girls longer. It is impossible to take girls here before they are 16 on account of the law, and it is difficult to train première danseuses at that age, but it is possible to make the girls into coryphées if they are studious, and mine have been of that class."

The twenty-four girls in the class went through a regular programme yesterday in the rehearsal room of the Metropolitan Opera House, which was filled with spectators for the occasion.

Each of the girls was dressed in the conventional white ballet skirt, and most of them wore fillets of pink in their hair and pink tights. They were all of them pretty, and as the dancing took place in the daylight none of them was made up.

At the command of their instructor the girls lined up on the stage, and first went through a drill showing the first elementary exercises. Then they went on through various stages of dancing, and the audience greeted every pause with enthusiastic applause. Balancing on one leg they twirled the other through the air with remarkable lightness, and they bounded about the stage as if they had been doing it all their lives.

The conclusion of the afternoon's entertainment was a small divertissement, in which Miss Eva Swain, one of the youngest of the pupils, did a solo, after which she was greeted with such insistent applause that she came very near having to do it all over again. In the course of this dance Miss Swain jumped backward on one foot, with her other foot pointed at right angles behind her, one of the feats with which Pavlova aroused great admiration last Winter.

After it was all over Mme. Cavallazzi received the congratulations of those present, and ice cream and cake were served by the ballet girls.

Mme. Cavallazzi was a famous dancer of her day. She appeared one year at the Metropolitan Opera House about twenty-five years ago, and her elopement with Charles Mapleson, a son of the famous impresario, was the cause of much excitement at the time. The dancer never returned to this country after the elopement until she came to open this ballet school last fall. She intends to stay near New York in the Summer, and will reopen her school in the Fall.

October 16, 1910

To say that history repeated itself yesterday afternoon at the Metropolitan Opera House, when Pavlowa and Mordkin reappeared with their own company, to give for the first time here a programme all by themselves, would be to express the case very mildly, indeed. It might almost be said that history was made on this occasion. It is doubtful if such dancing has ever been seen on the Metropolitan stage save when these two Russians were here last season, and it is certain that there never has been more enthusiasm let loose in the theatre on a Saturday afternoon than there was yesterday.

The programme included two complete ballets and several divertissements, and from 2:30 to 5:30, with intermissions now and then, Pavlowa and Mordkin gave exhibitions of their highly finished and poetic art.

The afternoon began with a performance of Adolphe Adam's ballet *Giselle*, which has never been given before on this stage and probably not often in New York, although it was seen here in 1842, one year after the original Paris production, which occurred at the Opera, with Carlotta Grisi as the unhappy heroine.

The subject for the ballet was taken from Heinrich Heine's book about Germany. "There exists a tradition of nocturnal dancers, known in the Slavic countries as the Wilis. The Wilis are betrothed girls who have died before their marriage. These poor creatures cannot remain tranquil in their tombs. In their hearts, which have stopped beating, in their dead feet, exists a love for dancing which they have not been able to satisfy during their lives. At midnight they rise and gather in troops, and unfortunate is the young man who encounters them. He is forced to dance with them until he falls dead.

"Garbed in their bridal robes, with crowns of orange blossoms on their heads and brilliant rings on their fingers, the Wilis dance in the moonlight like elves, their faces, although white as snow, are beautifully young. They smile with a joy so per-

fidious, they call you with so much seduction, their manner gives so many soft promises that these dead bacchantes are irresistible."

Théophile Gautier is said to have run across this passage one day and to have exclaimed involuntarily: "What a subject for a ballet!" Whereupon he sat down and wrote across the top of a blank sheet of paper: "Les Wilis, un ballet." However, he probably would have forgotten all about it if he had not encountered a composer at the Opéra that same evening. The result was that he and Saint-Georges collaborated on the book and Adam wrote the music. Coralli, the ballet master of the Opéra at that period, had enough to do with the book so that his name appears on the title page with the others.

This passage from Heine afterward attracted the eyes of other composers and librettists. The English composer, Loder, used the idea for his most successful opera, *The Night Dancers*, produced shortly after *Giselle*, and Puccini wrote his first opera, *Le Villi* on the same theme.

Carlotta Grisi danced the ballet and *Giselle* became the rage. Flowers, hats, gloves, dogs, and horses were named after her. The ballet was done almost immediately in England and America. But, strangely enough, it disappeared from the repertoire of the opera until it was revived in 1863 with Mlle. Mouravieva, herself a Russian from Moscow. She was described by one critic of the day as having plenty of technique but "not an atom of poetry."

In Russia *Giselle* has always been popular, and Mrs. Newmarch says that it was Tschaiowsky's ideal ballet when he composed his *Lac des Cygnes*. In Paris the past season has seen a revival of it, again by Russians.

The music is gently fragrant, a little faded here and there, but a pretty score, and one of Adam's best. Cuts were made freely. In fact, almost one-half of the music had been taken out, and this was probably for the best, as far as present-day audiences are concerned. There was one interpolation. In the first act a waltz from Glazunow's *Raymonda* was introduced, which was very much as if some conductor had performed *Also Sprach Zarathustra* somewhere in *Fra Diavolo*.

Mlle. Pavlowa yesterday revived this honeyfied and sentimental score of Adam's, full of the sad, gray splendor of the time of Louis Philippe. Grisi is said to have been gently melancholy in it, but Pavlowa was probably more than that. Her poetic conception of the betrothed girl's madness when

she finds that her lover has deceived her, and her death, came very close to being tragic. It is almost impossible to describe the poetry of her dancing in the second act, where as one of the Wilis she engages in the wildest sort of measures under the forest trees.

Mr. Mordkin had no dancing to do in this ballet, but in appearance and action he was superb. For some reason the programme referred to the Wilis as "fairies," which can scarcely be regarded as an accurate translation.

The second part of the programme consisted of divertissements beginning with a very pretty performance of Liszt's Second Rhapsodie by Mme. Pajitzkaia, and the corps de ballet. After this Pavlowa and Mordkin danced the adagio of Bleichmann and the Tchaikowsky Variation, in which they were often seen last year. After the bow and arrow dance, with which this divertissement concludes, it seemed as if Mr. Mordkin would never be able to leave the stage, the applause was so deafening and so long continued.

Some Russian dances followed to music from Glinka's *A Life for the Czar*, not by Tchaikowsky, as the programme stated, and this section of the programme was completed with the *Bacchanale* from Glazunow's ballet, *The Seasons*, in which Pavlowa and Mordkin swept the audience almost literally out of their chairs. This dance to many reaches the heights of choreographic art.

The ballet which concluded the programme was called *The Legend of Azyade*, and was doubtless suggested by a performance of Rimsky-Korsakow's symphony *Scheherazade* as a ballet at the Paris Opéra last Summer. However, Mordkin had arranged for this occasion an entirely different story and the music was taken from many sources although some of the themes from Rimsky-Korsakow's symphony were retained. Among the dances introduced was one from Bourgault-Ducoudray's opera *Tamara*, distinctly Persian in character, and quite extraordinarily sensuous in its rhythm and tonal monotony. Several other composers, including Chaminade and Glazunow, were called upon to contribute.

Pavlowa as the captive princess was as bewitching as possible, and Mordkin was so beautifully king-like that many in the audience were heard to condemn the escape of the captive princess at the close as an unhappy ending.

The small group of dancers which accompanies Pavlowa and Mordkin on this tour are most of them Russians and seemed to indicate that in Russia

as well as America Pavlowa and Mordkin are unsurpassed. The corps de ballet appeared to special advantage in *The Legend of Azyade*.

To Mr. Mordkin the highest praise is due for his work as a ballet master, for it was he who arranged the steps of all the dances and the programme of the afternoon which contained just the correct amount of diversity.

Theodore Stier, the conductor of the Bechstein Hall concerts in London, made his first American appearance and gave an especially poetic reading of *Giselle*, and put the requisite amount of sensuousness in the music for the Arabian ballet. The orchestra's performance of the music to which Mr. Mordkin dances the bow and arrow dance would suggest that more rehearsals might do it benefit if it were not remembered that the Metropolitan Opera House orchestra last season never succeeded in playing it even respectably.

February 16, 1911

Miss Isadora Duncan, the American girl who is directly responsible for a train of barefoot dancers who have spread themselves, like a craze, over two continents in the last five years, has returned to America, and yesterday she gave a new exhibition of her dancing, with the assistance of Walter Damrosch and the Symphony Society, at Carnegie Hall. Before the doors opened there were no seats to be had, and the long line of carriages which drew nigh the portals, as the hour set for the dancing to begin approached, indicated that Miss Duncan not only was the first of the barefoot dancers, but also the last. She not only has established her vogue, but she has also maintained it.

It has long been the custom for Miss Duncan to dance to music which originally belonged either to the opera house or the concert room. In years gone by she has lifted her feet to Chopin measures; to dances from the Gluck operas; and even to Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. This last was considered by many as a desecrating escapade, but many others paid money to see her do it, and Miss Duncan achieved some of her greatest popular success with the symphony which Wagner called the "apotheosis of the dance." Doubtless many people thereby became acquainted with a work of Beethoven which they never would have heard otherwise.

Yesterday Miss Duncan forsook the masters who have given her most of her material for dancing until now. She had arranged, in fact, an entirely new programme, through which to display her art.

It was made up of excerpts from the Wagner music dramas and Bach's Suite in D.

If Bach did not intend that his music should be danced to, at least several of the numbers in this suite bear the names of dances, so Miss Duncan cannot be taken too much to task for employing them for her purposes.

The stage setting was what it usually is at a Duncan seance. Green curtains depended from the heights of the stage and fell in folds at the back and sides leaving a semi-circular floor in the centre on which dim rose-colored lights flitted here, contrasting with shadows there. When Mr. Damrosch came to the conductor's desk and raised his baton, all the lights in the auditorium were extinguished. The orchestra played the prelude to the suite and then Miss Duncan appeared.

She wore, as she always does, some drapery of diaphanous material. She stood for a moment in the shadow at the back of the stage while the orchestra began the *Air*, the celebrated slow movement in the suite, which violinists play on the G string. Miss Duncan waved her arms and posed during this movement but did not do much of what is conventionally called dancing.

In the two Gavottes and the Gigue which fol-

lowed, however, the dancer was seen at her best. She flitted about the stage in her early Greek way and gave vivid imitations of what one may see on the spherical bodies of Greek vases. The Bourée from the suite the orchestra played alone and the first part of the programme closed with the Polacca from the first Brandenburg Concerto, also undanced.

There was a brief intermission before the Wagner excerpts were played. Then the house was darkened and the *Lohengrin* Prelude was performed. After this Miss Duncan gave her interpretation of the Flower Maidens' music from *Parsifal*.

This time she appeared in white gauze, beautifully draped. Her hair was caught up with flowers of pinkish hue. She evidently danced with an imaginary "Guileless Fool" standing in the centre of the stage. To him she appealed with all her gestures and all her postures. It was an interesting attempt to give the spirit of the scene in the Klingsor's garden. What it meant to those who have never heard Wagner's music drama this writer cannot profess to know.

The next number announced on the programme was the Prelude and *Liebestod* from *Tristan und Isolde*. Instead, however, of rapping for attention



Isadora Duncan (Arnold Genthe) (ca. 1916)

from his orchestra, Mr. Damrosch asked the audience for attention, turned about, and made a little speech.

The purport of his remarks was to the effect that it had originally been intended that Miss Duncan dance only music which had been arranged by Wagner in his music dramas for that purpose.

"It had been my intention," said Mr. Damrosch, "simply to play this music from *Tristan*. Yesterday, however, Miss Duncan modestly asked me if I would go through the *Liebestod* with her. She has, as is well known, a desire to unite dancing to music in a perfect whole, as an art which existed in the time of the early Greeks. Whatever she does now, of course, must be largely experimental. However, the results which she has already achieved with the *Liebestod* are so interesting that I think it only fair to set them before the public. As there are probably a great many people here to whom the idea of giving pantomimic expression to the *Liebestod* would be horrifying, I am putting it last on the programme, so that those who do not wish to see it may leave."

There was applause and then Miss Duncan gave her impressions of the Paris version of the Bacchanale from *Tannhäuser*, which were very pretty but hardly as bacchanalian as might have been expected. After the orchestra had played the prelude to *Die Meistersinger* she danced the Dance of the Apprentices from that music drama. It may be stated that Miss Duncan did her best dancing of the afternoon to this number and it was repeated.

As for the *Liebestod*, the anticipation of it evidently was not too horrible for any one to bear. People did not leave their seats, except possibly the usual few who are obliged to catch trains. Miss Duncan's conception of the music did not seem to suggest a pantomimic Isolde, nor was it exactly dancing. In other words, she puzzled those who knew the music drama, and did not interest those who did not. Therefore one may ask, Why?

February 21, 1911

It was to the operas of Gluck that Miss Isadora Duncan went for her first inspiration when she began her revivals of the Greek dance, and yesterday afternoon in Carnegie Hall she returned to Gluck. Her previous attempt to dance to the music from the lyric dramas of Richard Wagner had not resulted in complete success, but her spectators yesterday were pleased to see that Miss Duncan was herself again.

The first half of the programme consisted of copious excerpts from *Orfeo*, played in chronological order, and embracing the chief incidents of the book, with the exception of the scene in which Eurydice persuades Orpheus to turn and gaze upon her face. The Symphony Society of New York, Walter Damrosch conducting, played the music; a small chorus, seated among the orchestra, sang several of the choruses, and Mme. Florence Mulford sang several of Orpheus's airs.

In the first act, in a long robe of flowing gray, Miss Duncan represented one of the companions of Orpheus. Her poses and movements were intended to suggest the deepest grief. It was in the first scene of the second act, that of the scene in Hades, which was given in its entirety, that Miss Duncan, portraying one of the Furies, first aroused the enthusiasm of the audience. She indicated the gradual wavering of the Furies from the tremendous "No" in the beginning to the end when the Furies allow Orpheus to pass on to the Elysian Fields. The Dance of the Furies, with which this scene concludes, was a remarkable exhibition of dancing, evidence of high imagination.

It had originally been intended that several of the choruses and Orpheus's air from the scene of the Elysian Fields should be included in the programme scheme, but evidently it was found necessary to omit these. Only the ballet airs were presented from this scene, including the famous air with flute obbligato, which was exquisitely played by Mr. Barrère.

Miss Duncan, as a Happy Spirit, was as much at home as she had been previously as a Fury. From here on a long excision was made in the score until the finale was reached; even the famous chaconne was omitted. In the final scene, in which the chorus again appeared, Miss Duncan indicated the triumph of Love.

The excerpts were beautifully played by Mr. Damrosch and his orchestra. It is worthy of note that the seldom heard overture, a usually omitted ballet air, and the finale, which is replaced at the Metropolitan Opera House by a finale from another opera of Gluck, were restored. As has been stated, much else was omitted.

After an intermission Miss Duncan danced to some music by Schubert, and the orchestra played Dvorak's *In the Spinning Room*.

The Evening Globe, June 28, 1911

The production of a number of Russian ballets hereabouts has aroused some degree of critical in-

terest, which has expressed itself with more misconceptions than would be regarded as possible of so definite and limited a subject. We are told that the ballet — in its conventional form — has never been popular in New York. And yet in 1842 Fanny Elssler took \$148,000 away from America. She danced innumerable times in New York to enormous and enthusiastic audiences. Without citing other instances at wearisome length, it is enough to mention the recent success of Pavlowa and Mordkin, who actually drew larger audiences year before last to the Metropolitan Opera House than any operas or any singers of the year. Their success continues undiminished. The fact is, the ballet is just as popular here as it is elsewhere when great dancers trip into our ken.

We are further informed that Rimsky-Korsakow's *Scheherazade* is a "ballet suite." The composition is so well known to concert-goers as a symphonic suite — Gustav Mahler was the last man to conduct it here in concert — that it would seem as if even the humblest writer for the papers might have discovered as much. In its original form it is programme music, and depicts some of the "Arabian Nights" tales as told by Scheherazade. With almost diabolical cleverness a Russian ballet master has fashioned the present ballet from it, which relates the events in the "Arabian Nights" previous to the appearance of Scheherazade. The original music is used without a change, except for the fact that the third section is omitted. Rimsky-Korsakow is dead, but his widow has publicly protested on several occasions against the use of her husband's music for this purpose.

But perhaps the supreme error has been made by an evening contemporary, which speaks of *Les Sylphides* as a revival of the ballet in which Taglioni was most famous. Misinformation, it would seem, had reached the acme in this statement. Taglioni won her greatest triumph in a ballet called *La Sylphide*, a work in two acts, with a definite story, the scenes of which are laid in Scotland. The music, which was of no value, was written by a forgotten composer named Schneitzhoeffter. The book was by the tenor Adolphe Nourrit.

Les Sylphides of present fame was arranged by one of the Russian ballet masters within the last three years. It is a collection of Chopin dances, orchestrated and strung together with no dramatic connection. With *La Sylphide* it has nothing more to do than with the Eiffel Tower or the Spanish Armada.



Katerina Geltzer (Moscow : 1903)

December 20, 1911

Tchaikowsky's four-act ballet, *Le Lac des Cygnes*, received what was probably its first production in New York yesterday afternoon at the Metropolitan Opera House. The occasion also marked the return of the Russian Ballet and the first American appearance of Katerina Geltzer, the first dancer of the Moscow Imperial Opera, who created the sort of an impression which is only conjured up by great dancers.

Le Lac des Cygnes is an early work of the Russian composer, written in 1876, when he was in a period of great mental and physical unrest. Its opus number is 20 and it is preceded in his list of works by nothing more important than the first and second symphonies, the first string quartet, and the orchestral fantasia, *The Tempest*.

Tchaikowsky, like other Russians, was a devotee of dancing, and Begichev, then stage director of the Opera at Moscow, proposed to him that he write a ballet. The composer agreed, but stipulated for a fantastic subject from the chivalric age. His favorite ballet at that period was *Giselle*, for which Théophile Gautier wrote the book and Adolphe Adam the music. Begichev himself sketched out the plot for *Le Lac des Cygnes*.

We are introduced in the first act to Siegfried, a Prince of the fifteenth century. He has just come of age, and the opening scene is a celebration of this event. As the festivities draw to a conclusion a flock of swans wings its way across the sky and Siegfried and his friends depart to shoot them.

When they near the swans, however, they perceive beautiful young maidens, who tell how they are in the power of a sorcerer and may only achieve their human forms at night. Siegfried falls in love with the most beautiful of these swan maidens, and she tells him that she may escape the enchantment if she finds a man who will be true to his love for her. He promises to return to claim her.

The sorcerer, however, summons a spirit to impersonate Siegfried's swan love, Odetta, and Siegfried, deceived, proves false to his promise, and Odetta returns to the sorcerer's power. In despair, on learning the truth, he attacks the demon, who hurls him into the lake. He has now proved his love, and Odetta regains her original form, but now that Siegfried is dead, she, too, seeks death in the lake.

This romantic tale did not suffice for the purposes of the Moscow ballet master, and he asked Tchaikowsky to write a suite of national dances for the third act. They have nothing whatever to do with the story, but they serve their purpose as pretty character episodes.

The music is not by any means Tchaikowsky at his best. Both *La Belle au Bois Dormant* and *Casse-Noisette* are much better ballets. Some of the music of the first and second acts is banal, and there is a good deal of padding, mainly in the shape of long sequences, but every now and then, of course, there is charming music. The waltzes are especially pretty and the dramatic music is usually good enough for its purpose. A good deal of it was cut yesterday.

It is a curious fact that the principal theme of the ballet, which recurs again and again, is practically the same as the "Mystery of the Name" theme from *Lohengrin*, the notes to which Lohengrin sings, "Nie sollst du mich befragen." Now, Tchaikowsky visited Bayreuth in 1876, the year he wrote the ballet. Of course, *Lohengrin* was not sung at Bayreuth before 1894, however.

In the ballet of *The Sleeping Beauty* there is another curious Wagner reminiscence. The theme representing the sleeping Princess has a close analogy with that depicting the sleep of Brünnhilde. That, however, might have been conscious humor on Tchaikowsky's part.

Katerina Geltzer made a great success yesterday afternoon. In the second act of the ballet, in which she made her first appearance, she seemed nervous, but in the third act she danced so brilliantly that she soon had the house in an uproar.

She is not very tall and rather lithe, although the lower parts of her legs have an unfortunate muscular development. Her face is piquant and always expressive and her body has been trained to suggest every emotion. Her technique is of a very high order. Her *pirouette*, for instance, is nothing short of astounding. She has a fine sense of humor, which is displayed on occasion, and also imagination, poetry, and intelligence. She seems to be more physical in her appeal than Pavlova, and less delicate, not so mysteriously beautiful.

The comparison of the two inevitably brings to mind Taglioni and Fanny Elssler, and Miss Geltzer is more like the descriptions of the little Austrian.

Mr. Mordkin looked very wonderful and added greatly to the effect of the ballet, although he had very little dancing to do. The others were in the picture and assisted when necessary. Some of the dancing of the corps de ballet as swans was picturesque, especially at the close, where the waving fingers of the girls gave a weird effect.

The scenery, painted by James Fox of the Metropolitan Opera House in emulation of the Russian impressionistic style, was very pleasant, indeed. Why are not more productions made along these simple lines? The costumes, especially those of the third act, were beautiful. The lighting was good, and so was the stage management, but the swans flying across the background were not very successful. It would, perhaps, be better to resort to a cinematograph for this effect. The orchestra, it must be confessed, played very badly.

After the ballet there were a series of divertissements. Alexander Volinine had a chance to show his facility in a classic dance, which he had previously exhibited at the Winter Garden when he appeared with Miss Gertrude Hoffmann's troupe. Bronislawa Pajitskaia, who in private life is Mrs. Mikail Mordkin, was seen in a visualized conception of *Anitra's Dance*, from the *Peer Gynt* suite.

But almost the *clou* of the afternoon was the wonderful dancing of Katerina Geltzer and Mikail Mordkin in a number simply called *Etude*. This dance, which included a little touch of bacchanale, was irresistible, and is likely to be given countless repetitions during Miss Geltzer's brief stay in New York.



Waslav Nijinsky : *Narcisse* (1911), *Petrouchka* (1911), *Till Eulenspiegl* (1916)

Part two = Essays and Excerpts

The Secret of the Russian Ballet

Irony certainly directed the workings of fate when it was decreed, in this age of individualism, that the group-spirit should dominate the movements of the theatre, an institution in which, not so many years ago, the individual reigned. Democracy has two effects: it strengthens the individual and it gives him the power to join with other individuals in fostering the growth of his ideals. Thus Max Reinhardt, distinctly individual though he may be, has made his impression through his artists, his actors, and his musicians. So has Stanislavsky of Moscow, who in one instance solicited the services of Gordon Craig. The Irish Theatre movement,

which developed so great a genius as Synge and many lesser, but still important, writers, such as T. C. Murray and St. John Ervine, was essentially conceived in the group-spirit. But more than any of these, the most brilliant movement in the theatre of our time, the Russian Ballet (I am referring specifically to the organization under the direction of Serge de Diaghilew) has relied to an extraordinary degree on the group for its effect — one which, on modern art, music, dancing, stage decorations, and women's fashions, can scarcely be overestimated. I have heard it said, not altogether as a jest, that the Russian Ballet has had an influence on European politics.

There are still many people, however, who have never seen the performances of the Russian Ballet, who think of it only as an aggregation of virtuosi, much after the manner of one of Mr. Grau's all-star casts in *Les Huguenots*. It is true that the names of Nijinsky, Karsavina, Fokine, Massine, Bolm, and Fokina have inevitably awakened the same sort of magic sympathy that the names of Nordica, Melba, Calvé and the de Reszkes once evoked. The misunderstanding has followed in natural sequence. Nevertheless — and this is said without any desire to depreciate the value of the Russian stars — it is fortunate that the ideal of the producers of these mimed dramas is aimed higher than at the exploitation of individual talent. Their ultimate goals are cohesiveness and general pictorial effect. And this fact makes it possible for the Ballet to give representative performances with or without the aid of any particular dancer. In the summer of 1914, for example, in the absence of the superlative Nijinsky, the Russians made very lovely productions of Rimsky-Korsakow's *The Golden Cock* and Richard Strauss's *The Legend of Joseph*.

For any comprehensive view of the achievements of the organization, it is essential to remember that Mr. de Diaghilev's Russian Ballet began in Paris as an art exhibition; that is the secret. For two seasons Bakst and other Russian painters hung their pictures in the French capital. These two picture-shows are now included in the official lists of the Russian Ballet seasons, and by no means accidentally, or for purposes of misrepresentation. For the Ballet has, in a large sense, continued to be a picture-exhibition, and in spite of the fact that some of the novelty has been worn off by multiplied imitations, the thing itself still retains a good deal of the original impulse. The Russian Ballet, on its decorative side, is entirely responsible for the riot of color which has spread over the Western world in clothes and house furnishings. Without the Russian Ballet as an influence there could have been no Paul Poiret, no Paul Iribe, no Georges Barbier, no Jean Cocteau, no George Lepape, no Marcel Lejeune. There surely would have been no "Gazette de Bon-Ton" and no department-shop sales of striped and spotted fabrics of every shade under the sun. George Bernard Shaw did not stretch the truth when he said that for the past five years the Russian Ballet has furnished the sole inspiration for fashions in women's dress. . . . For confirmation, one does not need to remember any further back than the summer of 1914, when *Papillons* and *The Legend of Joseph*

were produced. The crinolined ruffled skirts of the former ballet and the prim Veronese gowns of the latter (recall Lillah McCarthy's dresses in *The Doctor's Dilemma*) have been repeated in a thousand forms. And so we might go back, year by year, to the season when Bakst's *Scheherazade* launched the Oriental craze which is still making itself felt in hamlets on the Great Lakes.

These decorations, and the costumes which accompany them, designed by such artists — many of them well-known painters in Russia — as Roerich, Bakst, Fedorowsky, Soudeikine, Golovine, Doboujinsky, Alexander Benois, and Nathalie Gontcharowa, are the basis of the beauty of the Russian Ballet, and they are so enchanting that no amount of imitation can entirely spoil them. When Roerich's scene for the Polovtsian camp in *Prince Igor*, a composition in dull greys and reds, with low, round-topped tents and rising columns of smoke, was disclosed in Paris, Jacques Blanche, the French painter, was moved to write an article in which he hailed the designer as the inventor of a new type of stage scenery, and even called upon the easel painters to learn a lesson in truth from this rugged Russian. Roerich subsequently designed the very beautiful green landscape of the first scene for Strawinsky's *The Sacrifice to the Spring*, and the gruesome setting, between somewhere and nowhere, of the second. To Fedorowsky are due the barbaric decorations and costumes for Moussorgsky's opera, *La Khovantchina*. The dresses of the Persian ballet in this opera, orange riots, speckled with patches of deep green and blue, have been plentifully imitated. Soudeikine devised the extravagant ostrich-plumed gauds worn by the six negroes who accompanied Florent Schmitt's *Salome* on her decadent way. And Nathalie Gontcharowa, with exquisite fantasy, designed the scenes and costumes for *The Golden Cock*, a production in which the Russians showed that they are willing to go yet further in the realms of color-combination than they had before ventured. Bakst, of course, is as well known to us as Aubrey Beardsley or Longfellow. There have been books of his work on sale; the magazines and newspapers have reprinted many of his best designs; there has been an exhibition of his original drawings at the Berlin Photographic Galleries in New York. However, in spite of the reproductions and imitations, I think those who have not yet seen a Bakst production, such as *Scheherazade*, *Daphnis et Chloë*, or the extraordinary *Legend of Joseph*, on the stage may prepare for a thrill.

The scene exposed on the very large Drury Lane stage as the curtain rose on Richard Strauss's ballet was certainly very splendid in its majestic beauty.

"The scene, the stage furniture, and the costumes are throughout in the manner of Paolo Veronese, and thus follow, in style and fashion, those of the period of about 1530. The Egyptian characters wear Venetian costumes; Joseph and the dealers who bring him to Potiphar, Oriental dress of the sixteenth century. The scene represents a huge pillared hall in the Palladian style. The pillars and ceiling are of bright gold with a greenish sheen. The floor is inlaid with blocks of colored marble. The background is traversed by a raised loggia, also of gold, which is open to the air on the farther side, and gives a view over gardens with playing fountains, and distant wings of the palace; the openings on the further side are, however, curtained during the banquet by a vast carpet of Flemish work representing the Earthly Paradise — stretches of verdure, alive with exotic beasts of every kind. The loggia has no balustrade, but is open between the pillars from floor to ceiling, so that the personages traversing it are entirely visible from head to foot. On the right a flight of steps leads up to the loggia. Over the floor of the loggia an Oriental carpet is hung, reaching down to the hall.

"On the stage in front of the loggia are set two tables at right angles to each other; the one furthest from the spectator is rather long and runs parallel to the supporting wall of the loggia; the other is short, and joins the first at right angles on the left. The table to the front is raised on three steps as a dais. On the tables are richly chiselled vessels of gold and silver, high ewers of cut crystal full to the brim with gleaming red and white wines, and dishes in which lie, heaped in profusion, pomegranates, peaches, and grapes of unusual size; golden platters and crystal glasses are before the guests. The guests — men and women by threes, in opulent Venetian costumes — sit at the farthestmost side of the table at the back, half concealed behind the vessels of gold, the crystal, and the piled fruit. At the table in front sit Potiphar and his wife, the latter in a robe of scarlet brocade, cut very low, over which hang long strings of pearls. At her feet on the lowest step of the dais, reposes a young female slave. The tables are served by eight Negro slaves in semi-Oriental garb of pink and gold, and on their heads are nodding plumes of white and pink. Behind the dais, in the angle to the left, under the



Tamara Karsavina, Adolph Bolm : *Pavillon d'Armide* (London : 1911)

loggia, stand Potiphar's bodyguard — gigantic mulattos, with breastplates of black inlaid with gold, of Toledo workmanship, with black plumes and halberds of gold. They also carry whips with short golden handles."

The spaciousness of this picture, the sense of splendor it conveyed, cannot be communicated second-hand. A young Spanish painter, Jose-Maria Sert, designed the majestic loggia, and Bakst vivified the scene, truly Veronese, with its women in gorgeous brocades, flaring skirts, puffed sleeves, and stilted mules, the officers in waving plumes, two of the slaves holding lank greyhounds in check. One detail was essentially Bakst. In the old Venetian costumes a panel of lace, down the front, covered the opening made by the flaring brocades. This Bakst removed, exposing the legs of his women, in silken hose, tightly trousered above the knee. This undergarmenting, in its inception, is authentic, as

anyone may see who visits the Museo Civico Correr in Venice.

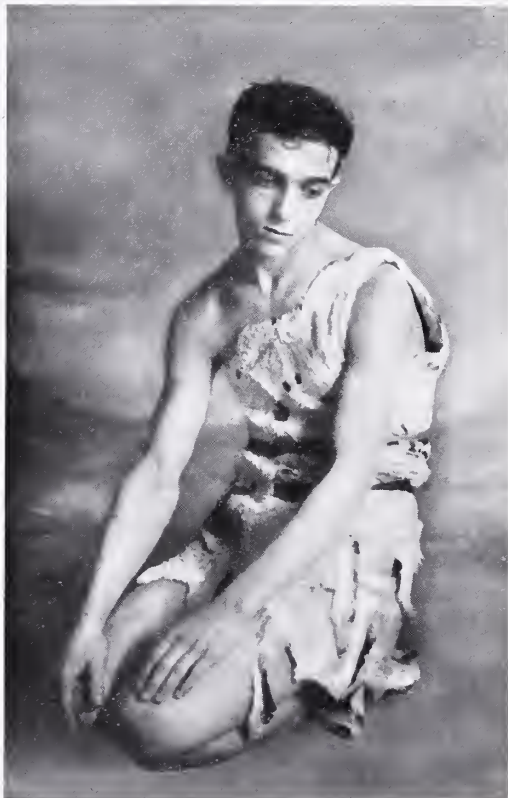
I have hesitated this long over *The Legend of Joseph* because, in reproduction at least, it is one of the least familiar of the Bakst ballets, not because it is more interesting than *Scheherazade*, *Daphnis et Chloë*, or a half-dozen other of this artist's productions.

In considering the factors which go to make up the perfection of this organization it is necessary to lay considerable stress on the importance of the music. In each of the cities where the Ballet has appeared a large orchestra of picked musicians (in some instances an organized orchestra, such as Thomas Beecham's in London) has assisted at the performances. The music of the ballets, even when adapted for this use, as in *Cléopâtre*, is of a fine quality, and in the variety of the compositions employed (ordinarily three or four ballets make up a programme) and in the manner of their performance there is the greatest amount of interest for those who are more interested in hearing than in seeing. Particularly is this true as the Russian Ballet has been the means of bringing some of the most radical and anarchistic of modern composers to a hearing before the public. Since Tchaikowsky wrote three ballets, no musician in Russia has considered it less than an honor to write for dancing.

Certain of the works performed have been taken from the concert room, *l'Après-midi d'un Faune*, for example, with the approval, and even the applause, of Monsieur Debussy; and *Scheherazade*, in spite of the protests of Rimsky-Korsakow's heirs. Balakirew's *Thamar*, too, was programme music before it became a ballet, but several works have been written for performance by this organization. Among these I may mention Maurice Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloë*, the music of which illustrates the action of the ballet but is not easily transferable to the concert room, although Ravel made an arrangement which the Colonne Orchestra has played in Paris and the Symphony Society of New York has performed in New York; Debussy's *Jeux*; Reynaldo Hahn's *Le Dieu Bleu*; Steinberg's *Midas*; Tcherepnine's *Narcisse*; Richard Strauss's *The Legend of Joseph*, which the composer himself conducted for several performances both in London and in Paris; and the three really extraordinary works of Igor Strawinsky, *The Firebird*, *Petrouchka*, and *The Sacrifice to the Spring*. I have elsewhere expressed my great admiration for the genius of this young

man; it is certainly my opinion that more inspiration is made manifest in these three works than in any other recent music I have heard in the theatre or the concert room. Paul Dukas also wrote a ballet for the Russians, *La Peri*, but the production was finally made under other auspices.

Any concert-goer will immediately note the fact that a good deal of the music in the répertoire of the Russian Ballet is familiar to him. Balakirew began his symphonic poem, *Tamara* (the ballet is called *Thamar*), suggested by a poem by Lermontoff, in 1867; it was concluded in 1882. The composer wrote in 1869 that he had composed parts of it as he "danced along" the street. The Chicago Orchestra performed the work for the first time in America in 1896. The Russian Symphony Society introduced it to New York in 1908. When the Russians adopted the work to use as a ballet the critic of the "Morning Times" in London said that the action did not fit the music very well, and yet the story of the ballet is almost precisely that of



Leonide Massine : *Joseph* (Berlin : 1914)

the symphonic poem, so that if anyone was at fault in this regard it must have been the composer.

The music has never made a profound impression in this country. Here is W. J. Henderson's account of it in "The Sun," following the performance by the Russian Symphony Society:

"Tamara was a queen, and she dwelt by the River Terek in an ancient tower, where she was wont to indulge in nights a la Cléopâtre russe. In the mornings the bodies of her lovers went floating down the stream, while she sang exquisite love-songs, just as if her lovers could be lured back. In the music of Balakirew one could hear the river, which sounded much like the Rhine, even to suggestions of the Drachenfels. The riotous nights were perhaps less clearly indicated. They were somewhat repressed, muffled, as it were. Perhaps Tamara, out of consideration for the neighbors, used to shut the windows when she was holding high jinks on the banks of the blue Terek in the Caucasus. But they had long nights up there, for the listener sitting outside the tower (in a hard orchestra chair) and waiting for the exquisite love-song, grew stiff and cold. And, after all, it was a mean little love-song, because it had no tune, and it would not have lured a red-headed boy, let alone a dead man."

However, Mr. Henderson had not seen Karsavina as the wicked queen when he wrote those lines, nor had he seen Bakst's gorgeous Georgian costumes — a variant, it is true, of the greens and blues with which he had decorated *Scheherazade*. The fault of the ballet, as a whole, is that it is reminiscent of *Scheherazade*; and yet it is effective and has persisted in the répertoire of the Russians since it was first given in 1912. The overdresses of the women gave rise to one of the fashions in women's gowns which spread over our world two years ago.

Rimsky-Korsakow's *Scheherazade* is another matter. The music was not written to accompany the story used in the ballet, and yet it fits it perfectly. Still, Mme. Rimsky-Korsakow (the composer, of course, is dead) protested violently against what she called a desecration of her husband's intention, when the ballet was first produced. (A similar protest was lodged against the organization in 1914, when it produced Rimsky-Korsakow's last opera, *The Golden Cock*, with a double cast, one choreographic and one vocal, although the opera had been written to be sung.) No piece of music is better known in the concert hall than this, and any concert-goer will remember the violin theme which portrays the last of the Sultan's wives, as she relates the four stories

from the "Arabian Nights" which the four movements of the Suite describe. The ballet follows the action of the prologue to these stories; the women of the harem steal the keys from the grand eunuch and let loose the black slaves for a drunken revel of lust, which is interrupted by the unexpected return of the sultan and swift death to all concerned. The third movement, that which in the Suite describes the love of the young prince and the young princess, was omitted from Fokine's original arrangement of the ballet, but in 1914 he added this movement to the action. *Scheherazade* has been considered since the time it was first produced in Paris some six years ago, the masterpiece of the Russians. It made the designer of its scenery and costumes, Leon Bakst, famous. His color-scheme, mostly of greens, blues, and oranges, has been frequently imitated in later theatrical productions. Karsavina's Zobeide is a suggestive picture of languorous lust, and Nijinsky, as the principal slave, alternates between surprising leaps into the air and the most lascivious gestures, as, like some animal, he paws the reclining Sultana.

L'Après-midi d'un Faune is as well known as *Scheherazade* in the concert room. This was the first ballet which Nijinsky staged (he also enacted the principal rôle). The music was written by Debussy as a prelude to Mallarmé's somewhat obscure poem. An English translation, at least an acceptable one, has hitherto been lacking, but Walter Conrad Arensberg's very sympathetic and understanding version has just appeared*; were it not for its length I should like to transcribe it here. When Debussy's work is performed Edmund Gosse's summary of his idea of the meaning of the poem (with which, by the way, the poet expressed himself as entirely pleased) usually appears in the programme notes. But Debussy's music is called a *prélude* to the poem and so the action of the ballet is a prelude to the wonderings of Mallarmé's faun. This is the scenario as it was printed in the programmes given out for the first Paris performances: "Ce n'est pas *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* de Stéphane Mallarmé; c'est, sur le prélude musical à cet épisode panique, une courte scène qui la précède: "Un Faune sommeille; "Des Nymphes le dupent; "Une écharpe oubliée satisfait son rêve. "Le rideau baisse pour que le poème commence dans toutes les mémoires."

There are, I think, seven nymphs engaged in the

* See "Idols" by Walter Conrad Arensberg; Houghton Mifflin Company, 1916.

performance. Their dresses and their actions are suggestive of the figures of Greek vases and bas-reliefs. One after another they flee from the strangely misunderstanding faun, until one, bolder than the others, approaches, almost to remain. The faun still does not understand and she, too, flees, dropping her scarf behind her. This the faun seizes and, as the curtain descends, returning to his rock, he presses this scarf to his lips and breast, in an erotic gesture. Nijinsky in this pantomime (it can scarcely be called a ballet) suggests all that the poem and the music call forth in imaginative minds. He has dehumanized the characters and, in a sense, thereby taken away the sting of the too intense voluptuousness of the action. However, in spite of this fact, and the further one that Monsieur Debussy, unlike Mme. Rimsky-Korsakow, not only approved of the use of his music in this form but even applauded it, the first performance in Paris (1912) was hissed. Paul Souday, a well-known critic, led the opposition, and Rodin took up the cudgels for the defense. "Accusé d'avoir 'offensé la morale,' Nijinsky s'est empressé de donner satisfaction à M. Paul Souday en supprimant sa 'mimique indecente' à la fin du ballet. Et pourtant, son illusoire possession de la nymphe enfuïée, ce corps étendu sur le voile encore parfumé d'elle, c'était beau!" wrote Gauthier-Villars. It is true that Nijinsky altered his original performance for a few evenings; then, however, he returned to his original conception. Meanwhile, the troupe moved to London, where *l'Après-midi d'un Faune* was acclaimed above all the other ballets, and almost invariably repeated. Since then it has seldom been given in London and Paris without the audience demanding a repetition.

Les Sylphides, *Papillons*, *Carnaval*, and *Le Spectre de la Rose*, are all exquisite studies of a different style from the three ballets I have mentioned. *Carnaval* is undoubtedly the best of the lot, although Nijinsky as the rose ghost (the fable was suggested by a poem by Théophile Gautier) who comes to a young girl in a dream and bounds out of the window, like a spirit, at dawn, is in his most poetical mood. *Papillons* is the newest of these four ballets, and for it Bakst designed some charming crinolined dresses. Pierrot, in the garden, after the dance, has set a candle to catch butterflies, and as the dancers flit out, each pretending to be a butterfly, he tries to catch them, until the coming of their parents to take them home teaches him the bitter truth that they are only young girls. The music is by Schumann, orchestrated by Tcherepnine. *Les*



Tamara Karsavina : *Carnaval* (1912)

Sylphides is little more than a suite of dances in a charming adaptation by Bakst of the conventional ballet costume. Glazunow and other Russian composers have orchestrated these Chopin waltzes, mazurkas and preludes. In *Carnaval* (orchestrated by Tcherepnine, Glazunow, Liadow, and Rimsky-Korsakow) the fanciful names by which Schumann designated several movements in these delightful piano pieces are transferred to the characters. Nijinsky is the Harlequin; Karsavina, Colombine, etc., while such pieces as Dancing Letters and Paganini are employed as divertissements. The scene, with the two Victorian sofas at the back and Pierrot lying over the footlights, is charming. The principal characters are those of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, while the other dancers are dressed in the costumes of 1830.

Le Pavillon d'Armide is a graceful combination of two picturesque periods of romantic art, for a French Vicomte, storm-stayed on his travels, is offered hospitality by a Marquis, who lodges him in a pavilion of his castle, where the Gobelins



Tamara Karsavina : *Salome* (London : 1914)

tapestry comes to life during the night. The whole thing is, of course, a dream, in which the Vicomte sees in the Magician of the tapestry the person of his host, and himself plays the part of Rinaldo (the characters are those of Quinault's play set to music by Lulli and Gluck). With the transformation, when Armida and her court come to life, what really comes to life is the court of Versailles; here is the Grand Monarque himself, and there the most enchanting group of courtiers in pink with feather head-dresses dance with the ladies whose costumes combine the grace of Watteau with the conventional tutu with the happiest results.

In the dances from *Prince Igor*, accompanied by a chorus, the Russians let themselves go to a degree which would mean a totally unrestrained performance in the hands of another group of dancers. It is almost impossible to believe, after witnessing these wild Polovtsian dances, that the action has been perfectly ordered by Fokine and can be repeated exactly at any time. The ballet occupies almost all of the fourth act of Borodine's opera. I

believe that the choruses to which these dances are performed were sung at a concert of the MacDowell Chorus in Carnegie Hall, March 3, 1911. The New York Winter Garden once utilized the music for a ballet. The scene used by the Russians, painted by Roerich, is marvelously suggestive of barbarism; the now languorous, now passionate music, pulsing with rhythm, is admirably adapted to dancing. Usually Mme. Fokina and Bolm are seen in these dances, but it is the ballet corps itself which becomes the important feature in their success.

"How excellently," says one foreign critic, "every means that the theatre offers has been made use of to produce the desired effect; the menace of the coming cloud of barbarians that is to lie for centuries on the desolate face of Russia (for we are in the camp of the Polovtsians, forerunners of the great invasion); not the loud blustering of a Tamburlaine the Great, but the awful, quiet vigor, half melancholy, half playful, of a tribe that is but a little unit in the swarm; the infinite horizons of the steppe, with the line of the buried tumuli stretching away to endless times and places, down the centuries into Siberia; the long-drawn, resigned, egoless music (Borodine drew his themes from real Tartar-Mongol sources); the women that crouch, unconscious of themselves, or rise and stretch lazy limbs, and in the end fling themselves carelessly prone when their dance is over; the savage-joyful panther leaping of the men; the stamping feet and quick, nerve-racking beat of the drum; and more threatening than all, the gambolling of the boys, like kittens unwittingly preparing themselves for the future chase."

But whose is the guiding hand, the hand that combines the rhythms, the colors, and the human element in these works? It is Fokine's; without Fokine I do not see very well how these ballets could come into existence. (I am now speaking of Fokine, of course, entirely as a producer. He is also known as a dancer. One must bear in mind, also, that Nijinsky's three ballets — he contrived the action for *l'Après-midi d'un Faune*, *Jeux*, and *The Sacrifice to the Spring* — were very original and effective.) Until Fokine began to work, the ballet master had been content to arrange all his *coryphées* in straight lines across the stage, each dancer making the same simultaneous movement as her neighbor. Fokine divined the ineffectiveness of this false symmetry. He divided his forces into many groups, each group a unit in movement. (The ultimate result of the application of this principle was Nijin-

sky's staging of *The Sacrifice to the Spring*, in which each dancer was set a separate simultaneous task.) Nor did Fokine allow any one group of dancers the whole of any movement in the music. He subdivided the movements into phrases. He really divided his ballet into choirs, just as Richard Strauss and Reger subdivided the orchestra, in which, in the time of Bellini and Donizetti, large bodies of the strings used to play in unison. Then each choir was given certain phrases to interpret, some in the background, some in the foreground, until the polyphony of the music was perfectly synchronized with the action of the ballet. Many of the ideas for Fokine's ballets were derived from pictures. It is possible to see at once the pictorial resemblance between *The Legend of Joseph* and Veronese's *The Marriage at Cana*, or between *Midas* and Mantegna's *Parnasse* in the Louvre. But

Fokine also learned how to control movement, and how to preserve balance from pictures. In the Accademia di Belle Arti in Venice there is a room devoted to large paintings by Gentile Bellini and Vittore Carpaccio, depicting events in Venetian history. In one of them is a procession, and a study of the different groups of marchers and bystanders will give you an excellent idea of the effective and pictorial intricacy of a Fokine ballet. In *The Legend of Joseph* Fokine attains one of his most thrilling effects in the last scene, where the handmaidens of the refused Potiphar's wife, clad in black gauze, with bare arms and legs, wave their arms in a frenzy of hysterical disdain at the offending Joseph. Shortly after seeing the ballet, in walking through the Egyptian rooms of the British Museum, I came across an Egyptian fresco which almost seemed to me at first, in the exact spirit in which Fokine had caught its feeling, to be a photograph of the action I had seen on the stage.



Nijinsky and Karsavina : *Le Spectre de la Rose* (Paris : 1911)

Russians are natural dancers. It is said that only Russians and Poles can learn to do the mazurka properly, in which the women engage in that peculiar gliding step which someone characterized as the definite expression of Meredith's phrase, "gliding women." So, under the guidance of Fokine, with the inspiration which such music and color as are provided for them can give, the Russians engaged in dancing these ballets easily rise to an unattainable (for other dancers) height of seeming spontaneity. They have that "like-to-do-it" and creative (as opposed to reproductive) air which every stage director knows is almost impossible to instill into a large company with any hope that it will be retained after the first performance. But the Russians never seem to lose it. A ballet, given so often as *Scheherazade*, during a period extending over many seasons, always seems freshly produced. There are no slovenly details. The wild orgy of the Polovtsian dances of *Prince Igor* is invariably exposed with a feeling on the part of the spectator that he is witnessing the intense enjoyment of the participants.

Another important point is the variety in the ballets, a variety which covers not only subject and music, but also treatment in decoration and staging, so that such an ultra-modern work as *The Sacrifice to the Spring*, staged by Nijinsky in an attempt to emulate the style of the futurists in painting, with music by Strawinsky, who might be called a master of dissonance, and with decorations in hard and primitive colors by Roerich, finds itself naturally

side by side with the charming and poetic *Sylphides*, gracefully staged by Fokine, with music by Chopin (orchestrated), and with decorations in pale green and white by Bakst. Of course, some ballets, because of their fables, or the nature of their music, naturally resemble one another. *Scheherazade*, *Cléopâtre* and *Thamar* all have certain points in common; so have *Les Sylphides*, *Carnaval*, and *Papillons*. There is further a resemblance between *Daphnis et Chloë*, *Narcisse*, and *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*. But it is easy to vary these likenesses by not putting them into juxtaposition, by mingling them with the bizarre *Petrouchka*, the barbaric Polovtsian dances from *Prince Igor*, the idealistic *Spectre de la Rose*, with Weber's *Invitation to the Dance* as its accompaniment, the gorgeous and pompous *Legend of Joseph*, the frivolous *Midas*, the exotic *Le Dieu Bleu*, or the pageantry of the dances from Rimsky-Korsakow's *Sadko*.

It is impossible, of course, to ignore the genius and virtuosity of individual interpretation entirely in a study of the Russian Ballet, minimize as one may its importance. There have been very many pages written in an attempt to capture the charm and genius of Nijinsky on paper. He has been described variously as "half-human, half-god," as a tongue of flame, and as a jet of water spurting from a fountain. The word "youth" expresses something of the wonder of this marvelous boy. He never seems to be doing anything difficult, and yet his command of technique is incredible. He always seems spontaneous, and yet I have been told that, like Olive Fremstad, he does not make the slightest movement of a finger which has not been carefully thought out. He seems to me to be the greatest of stage artists (and I include all concert musicians as well as opera singers and actors in this sweeping statement). I mean by this that he communicates more of beauty and emotion to me as a spectator than other interpretative artists do. All impressions of this sort are necessarily personal, but they do not for that reason lack value. It is essential, however, to see Nijinsky in a variety of parts to get his true measure. As the lover of the sylphs in *Les Sylphides* he is pale *effeminé*, a Chopinist, a charming Aubrey Beardsley drawing, a poetic figure in line, and grace, and sentiment. In *Petrouchka* he is a puppet, and — remarkable touch — a puppet with a soul. His performance in this ballet (the characters are marionettes, but the story is something like that of *Pagliacci*) is, perhaps, his most wonderful achievement. He suggests only the puppet in action; his



Michel Fokine : *Daphnis et Chloë* (Paris : 1912)

facial expression never changes; yet the pathos is greater, more keenly carried over the footlights, than one would imagine possible under any conditions. I have seen Fokine in the same rôle, and although he gives you all the gestures the result is not the same. It is genius that Nijinsky puts into his interpretation of the part. Who can ever forget Nijinsky as *Petrouchka* when thrown by his master into his queer black box, mad with love for the dancer, who, in turn, prefers the Moor puppet, rushing about waving his pathetically stiff arms in the air, and finally beating his way with his clenched fists through the paper window to curse the stars? It is a more poignant expression of grief than most Romeos can give us. *Jeux* shows us the love games of a trio (two women and a man) searching for a tennis ball in a garden at twilight. It recalls itself to me chiefly for the glissando (the music is by Debussy) with which the ballet begins as the tennis ball bounces across the stage, followed by Nijinsky, who bounds across the broad stage of the Théâtre des Champs Elysées in Paris in two leaps. These leaps are triumphs of dexterity, grace of motion, and thrill. They have given rise to the rumor that



Nijinsky : *Jeux* (Paris : 1913)

Nijinsky's element is the air. In *l'Après-midi d'un Faune* he makes only one of these quick movements, but with such astonishing effect that on one occasion (it was the third time I had seen this stage arrangement of Debussy's *prélude* to Mallarmé's poem) my companion, a well-known dramatic critic who sits stolidly through performances by all the great tragedians, burst into tears. In *Scheherazade*, as the black slave of the harem who dominates the story of the ballet, Nijinsky utilizes his leap to dominate the bacchanale, which is the climax of that piece of sensual excitement. As the crowd of women, wives of the sultan, and black slaves, drunk with wine and lust, enter into the wildest dance, the Negro in silver trousers in the centre of the stage leaps higher and higher straight into the air above the heads of his companions. . . . The descent, with the indescribable curve of the legs, is something to be seen. In *Carnaval*, Nijinsky enacts the Harlequin with great roguishness and impertinence. To the piece called *Reconnaissance* he dances with Karsavina, as Colombine, the most entrancing of polkas. His dancing of the piece called *Paganini*, however, is most memorable. At that point where the dominant seventh on E flat emerges through a deft use of the pedal, he represents the effect to perfection by suddenly sitting down. It is not, as a matter of fact, as a mere dancer that Nijinsky excels, although he does excel even there, but it is in the poetic interpretation of his rôle, the genius in his playing, that he expresses so much more than his nearest rival. He is incomparable as a dancer, as you may very well see in works like *Carnaval* and *Les Sylphides*, in which dancing dominates the action; but even in these ballets he never loses sight of characterization or of the value of the ensemble.

Tamara Karsavina is a very beautiful woman, although her beauty has not the subtle quality of the more gifted Anna Pavlova. She is an artist and a fine dancer, a mime of great talent. She fits more perfectly into an ensemble scheme than Pavlova, who was once a member of this organization herself.

She is delicate and flower-like and she puts on the atmosphere of vice with a great degree of verisimilitude. Her Salome, with the painted roses on her nude knees and breasts, is a fragile bit of decadence. As the temptress Queen of *The Golden Cock* she suggests the strange perverted power of a Kundry, an Astarte, or a Loreley. In *The Legend of Joseph* it is her duty to sit at a table without changing her expression throughout almost an entire act. It is a difficult task; one must perceive the depths of the women's boredom, which does not express itself even in impatience and she must dominate the scene. She accomplishes this feat successfully, as she does also the long walk across the stage in stilted Venetian shoes at the close of the scene. In *Petrouchka* she is a fitting companion to Nijinsky, and her little dance with the cornet is a delicious and entrancing moment; her Chloë is exquisite, soft, Greek, and girlish, and in Ravel's ballet and in Florent Schmitt's *Salome* she dances on her toes in bare feet (remember that half the so-called "toe-dancers" resort to padded and reinforced slippers for their power). I never lack enthusiasm for Karsavina; but I cannot place her near Nijinsky.

The crescendo of eulogy with which these notes progress seems unavoidable. If one is in sympathy with the aims of this group of artists (Gordon Craig is not, I believe), one must recognize the brilliancy with which they have carried them out. Naturally, there are flaws. Doboujinsky's costumes for *Midas* are certainly very hard in color; Steinberg's music for the same ballet, a series of futile brass blares; the story itself (Bakst should confine himself to painting), a bore. Massine is scarcely the dancer one would have chosen for so important a rôle as Joseph, which, on the other hand, he is suited to physically. Karsavina's portrayal of the ultimate emotions of Potiphar's wife is a little unconvincing. I do not even admire Bakst's setting for his very lovely costumes in *l'Après-midi d'un Faune*. But these are very small insects in the amber of enjoyment.

November, 1915

(From "Music After the Great War and other studies," G. Schirmer, New York, 1915)

• Waslav Nijinsky

Serge de Diaghilew brought the dregs of the Russian Ballet to New York and, after a first greedy gulp, inspired by curiosity to get a taste of this highly advertised beverage, the public drank none too greedily. The scenery and the costumes, de-

signed by Bakst, Roerich, Benois, and Larionow, and the music by Rimsky-Korsakow, Tcherépnine, Schumann, Borodine, Balakirew, and Stravinsky — especially Stravinsky — arrived. It was to be deplored, however, that Bakst had seen fit to replace

the original décor of *Scheherazade* by a new setting in rawer colors, in which the flaming orange fairly burned into the ultramarine and green (readers of *A Rebours* will remember that des Esseintes designed a room something like this). A few of the dancers came, but of the best not a single one. Nor was Fokine, the dancer-producer, who devised the choreography for *The Firebird*, *Cléopâtre*, and *Petrouchka*, among the number, although his presence had been announced and expected. To those enthusiasts, and they included practically every one who had seen the Ballet in its greater glory, who had prepared their friends for an overwhelmingly brilliant spectacle, over-using the phrase, "a perfect union of the arts," the early performances in January, 1916, at the Century Theatre were a great disappointment. Often had we urged that the individual played but a small part in this new and gorgeous entertainment, but now we were forced to admit that the ultimate glamour was lacking in the ensemble, which was obviously no longer the glad, gay entity it once had been.

The picture was still there, the music (not always too well played) but the interpretation was mediocre. The agile Massine could scarcely be called either a great dancer or a great mime. He had been chosen by Diaghilew for the rôle of Joseph in Richard Strauss's version of the Potiphar legend but, during the course of a London season carried through without the co-operation of Nijinsky, this was the only part allotted to him. In New York he interpreted, not without humor and with some technical skill, the incidental divertissement from Rimsky-Korsakow's opera, *The Snow-Maiden*, against a vivid background by Larionow. The uninspired choreography of this ballet was also ascribed to Massine by the programme, although probably in no comminatory spirit. In the small rôle of Eusebius in *Carnaval* and in the negligible part of the Prince in *The Firebird* he was entirely satisfactory, but it was impertinent of the Direction to assume that he would prove an adequate substitute for Nijinsky in rôles to which that dancer had formerly applied his extremely finished art.

Adolph Bolm contributed his portraits of the Moor in *Petrouchka*, of Pierrot in *Carnaval*, and of the Chief Warrior in the dances from *Prince Igor*. These three rôles completely express the possibilities of Bolm as a dancer or an actor, and sharply define his limitations. His other parts, Darkon in *Daphnis et Chloë*, Sadko, the Prince in *Thamar*, Amoun in *Cléopâtre*, the Slave in *Sche-*



Adolph Bolm : *Prince Igor* (New York : 1916)

herazade, and Pierrot in *Papillons*, are only variations on the three aforementioned themes. His friends often confuse his vitality and abundant energy with a sense of characterization and a skill as a dancer which he does not possess. For the most part he is content to express himself by stamping his heels and gnashing his teeth, and when, as in *Cléopâtre*, he attempts to convey a more subtle meaning to his general gesture, he is not very successful. Bolm is an interesting and useful member of the organization, but he could not make or unmake a season; nor could Gavrilow, who is really a fine dancer in his limited way, although he is unfortunately lacking in magnetism or any power of characterization.

But it was on the distaff side of the cast that the Ballet seemed pitifully undistinguished, even to those who did not remember the early Paris seasons when the roster included the names of Anna Pavlova, Tamara Karsavina, Katerina Geltzer, and Ida Rubinstein. The leading feminine dancer of the troupe when it gave its first exhibitions in New York was Xenia Maclezova, who had not, so far as my memory serves, danced in any London or Paris season of the Ballet (except for one gala performance at the Paris Opéra which preceded the Ameri-

can tour) unless in some very menial capacity. This dancer, like so many others, had the technique of her art at her toes' ends. Sarah Bernhardt once told a reporter that the acquirement of technique never did any harm to an artist, and if one were not an artist it was not a bad thing to have. I have forgotten how many times Mlle. Macezova could *pirouette* without touching the toe in the air to the floor, but it was some prodigious number. She was past mistress of the *entrechat* and other mysteries of the ballet academy. Here, however, her knowledge of her art seemed to end, in the subjugation of its very mechanism. She was very nearly lacking in those qualities of grace, poetry, and imagination with which great artists are freely endowed, and although she could not actually have been a woman of more than average weight, she often conveyed to the spectator an impression of heaviness. In such a work as *The Firebird* she really offended the eye. Far from interpreting the ballet, she gave you an idea of how it should not be done.

Her season with the Russians was terminated in very short order, and Lydia Lopoukova, who happened to be in America, and who, indeed, had already been engaged for certain rôles, was rushed into her vacant slippers. Now Mme. Lopoukova had charm as a dancer, whatever her deficiencies in technique. In certain parts, notably as Colombine in *Carnaval*, she assumed a roguish demeanor which was very fetching. As La Ballerine in *Petrouchka*, too, she met all the requirements of the action. But in *Le Spectre de la Rose*, *Les Sylphides*, *The Firebird*, and *La Princesse Enchantée*,* she floundered hopelessly out of her element.

Tchernicheva, one of the lesser but more steadfast luminaries of the Ballet, in the rôles for which she was cast, the principal Nymph in *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*, Echo in *Narcisse*, and the Princess in *The Firebird*, more than fulfilled her obligations to the ensemble, but her opportunities in these mimic plays were not of sufficient importance to enable her to carry the brunt of the performances on her lovely shoulders. Flore Revalles was drafted, I understand, from a French opera company. I have been told that she sings — Tosca is one of her rôles — as well as she dances. That may very well be. To impressionable spectators she seemed a real femme fatale. Her *Cléopâtre* suggested to me a Parisian cocotte much more than an Egyptian queen. It would be blasphemy to compare her with Ida Rubin-

stein in this rôle — Ida Rubinstein, who was true Aubrey Beardsley! In Thamar and Zobeide, both to a great extent dancing rôles, Mlle. Revalles, both as dancer and actress, was but a frail substitute for Karsavina.

The remainder of the company was adequate, but not large, and the ensemble was by no means as brilliant as those who had seen the Ballet in London or Paris might have expected. Nor in the absence of Fokine, that master of detail, were performances sufficiently rehearsed. There was, of course, explanation in plenty for this disintegration. Gradually, indeed, the Ballet as it had existed in Europe had suffered a change. Only a miracle and a fortune combined would have sufficed to hold the original company intact. It was not held intact, and the war made further inroads on its integrity. Then, for the trip to America many of the dancers probably were inclined to demand double pay. Undoubtedly, Serge de Diaghilew had many more troubles than those which were celebrated in the public prints, and it must be admitted that, even with his weaker company, he gave us finer exhibitions of stage art than had previously been even the exception here.

In the circumstances, however, certain pieces, which were originally produced when the company was in the flush of its first glory, should never have been presented here at all. It was not the part of reason, for example, to pitchfork on the Century stage an indifferent performance of *Le Pavillon d'Armide*, in which Nijinsky once disported himself as the favorite slave, and which, as a matter of fact, requires a company of virtuosi to make it a passable diversion. *Cléopâtre*, in its original form, with Nijinsky, Fokine, Pavlowa, Ida Rubinstein, and others, hit all who saw it square between the eyes. The absurdly expurgated edition, with its inadequate cast, offered to New York, was but the palest shadow of the sensuous entertainment that had aroused all Paris, from the Baignolles to the Bastille. The music, the setting, the costumes — what else was left to celebrate? The altered choreography, the deplorable interpretation, drew tears of rage from at least one pair of eyes. It was quite incomprehensible also why *The Firebird*, which depended on the grace and poetical imagination of the filmiest and most fairy-like actress-dancer, should have found a place in the répertoire. It is the dancing equivalent of a coloratura soprano rôle in opera. Thankful, however, for the great joy of having reheard Strawinsky's wonderful score, I am willing to overlook this tactical error.

* This was the name given that season to the Bluebird Variation from *The Sleeping Beauty*.

All things considered, it is small wonder that a large slice of the paying population of New York tired of the Ballet in short order. One reason for this cessation of interest was the constant repetition of ballets. In London and Paris the seasons as a rule have been shorter, and on certain evenings of the week opera has taken the place of the dance. It has been rare indeed that a single work has been repeated more than three or four times during an engagement. I have not found it stupid to listen to and look at perhaps fifteen performances of varying degrees of merit of *Petrouchka*, *Scheherazade*, *Carnaval*, and the dances from *Prince Igor*; I would rather see the Russian Ballet repeatedly, even as it existed in America, than four thousand five hundred and six Broadway plays or seventy-three operas at the Metropolitan once, but I dare say I may look upon myself as an exception.

At any rate, when the company entered upon a four weeks' engagement at the Metropolitan Opera House, included in the regular subscription season

of opera, the subscribers groaned; many of them groaned aloud, and wrote letters to the management and to the newspapers. To be sure, during the tour which had followed the engagement at the Century the repertoire had been increased, but the company remained the same — until the coming of Waslav Nijinsky.

When America was first notified of the impending visit of the Russian Ballet it was also promised that Waslav Nijinsky and Tamara Karsavina would head the organization. It was no fault of the American direction or of Serge de Diaghilew that they did not do so. Various excuses were advanced for the failure of Karsavina to forsake her family in Russia and to undertake the journey to the United States but, whatever the cause, there seems to remain no doubt that she refused to come. As for Nijinsky, he, with his wife, had been a prisoner in an Austrian detention camp since the beginning of the war. Wheels were set grinding but wheels grind slowly in an epoch of international bloodshed, and



Scheherazade (New York : 1916)

it was not until March, 1916, that the Austrian ambassador at Washington was able to announce that Nijinsky had been set free.

I do not believe the coming to this country of any other celebrated person had been more widely advertised, although P. T. Barnum may have gone further in describing the charitable and vocal qualities of Jenny Lind. Nijinsky had been extravagantly praised, not only by the official press representatives but also by eminent critics and private persons, in adjectives which seemed to preclude any possibility of his living up to them. I myself had been among the paean singers. I had thrust "half-man, half-god" into print. "A flame!" cried some one. Another, "A jet of water from a fountain!" Such men in the street as had taken the trouble to consider the subject at all very likely expected the arrival of some stupendous and immortal monstrosity, a gravity-defying being with sixteen feet (at least), who bounded like a rubber ball, never touching the solid stage except at the beginning and end of the evening's performance.

Nijinsky arrived in April. Almost immediately he gave vent to one of those expressions of temperament often associated with interpretative genius, the kind of thing I have described at some length in "Music and Bad Manners." He was not all pleased with the Ballet as he found it. Interviewed, he expressed his displeasure in the newspapers. The managers of the organization wisely remained silent, and a controversy was avoided, but the public had received a suggestion of petulance which could not contribute to the popularity of the new dancer.

Nijinsky danced for the first time in New York on the afternoon of April 12, at the Metropolitan Opera House. The pieces in which he appeared on that day were *Le Spectre de la Rose* and *Petrouchka*. Some of us feared that eighteen months in a detention camp would have stamped their mark on the dancer. As a matter of fact his connection with the Russian Ballet had been severed in 1913, a year before the war began. I can say for myself that I was probably a good deal more nervous than Nijinsky on the occasion of his first appearance in America. It would have been a cruel disappointment to me to discover that his art had deteriorated during the intervening years since I had last seen him. My fears were soon dissipated. A few seconds after he, as the Rose Ghost, had bounded through the window, it was evident that he was in possession of all his powers; nay, more,

that he had added to the refinement and polish of his style. I had called Nijinsky's dancing perfection in years gone by, because it so far surpassed that of his nearest rival; now he had surpassed himself. True artists, indeed, have a habit of accomplishing this feat. I may call to your attention the careers of Olive Fremstad, Yvette Guilbert, and Marie Tempest. Later I learned that this first impression might be relied on. Nijinsky, in sooth, has now no rivals upon the stage. One can only compare him with himself.

The Weber-Gautier dance-poem, from the very beginning until the end, when he leaps out of the girl's chamber into the night, affords this great actor-dancer one of his most grateful opportunities. It is in this very part, perhaps, which requires almost unceasing exertion for nearly twelve minutes, that Nijinsky's powers of co-ordination, mental, imaginative, muscular, are best displayed. His dancing is accomplished in that flowing line, without a break between poses and gestures, which is the despair of all novices and almost all other virtuosi. After a particularly difficult leap or toss of the legs or arms, it is a marvel to observe how, without an instant's pause to regain his poise, he rhythmically glides into the succeeding gesture. His dancing has the unbroken quality of music, the balance of great painting, the meaning of fine literature, and the emotion inherent in all these arts. There is something of transmutation in his performances; he becomes an alembic, transforming movement into a finely wrought and beautiful work of art. The dancing of Nijinsky is first an imaginative triumph, and the spectator, perhaps, should not be interested in further dissection of it, but a more intimate observer must realize that behind this the effect produced depends on his supreme command of his muscles. It is not alone the final informing and magnetized imaginative quality that most other dancers lack; it is also just this muscular co-ordination. Observe Gavrilow in the piece under discussion, in which he gives a good imitation of Nijinsky's general style, and you will see that he is unable to maintain this rhythmic continuity.

Nijinsky's achievements become all the more remarkable when one remembers that he is working with an imperfect physical medium. Away from the scene he is an insignificant figure, short and ineffective in appearance. Aside from the pert expression of his eyes, he is like a dozen other young Russians. Put him unIntroduced into a drawing-room with Jacques Copeau, Orchidée, Doris Keane,

Bill Haywood, the Baroness de Meyer, Paulet Thévenaz, the Marchesa Casati, Marcel Duchamp, Cathleen Nesbitt, H. G. Wells, Anna Pavlova, Rudyard Kipling, Vladimir Rebikow, Henriette Wast, and Isadora Duncan, and he probably would pass entirely unnoticed. On the stage it may be observed that the muscles of his legs are overdeveloped and his ankles are too large; that is, if you are in the mood for picking flaws, which most of us are not in the presence of Nijinsky in action. Here, however, stricture halts confounded; his head is set on his shoulders in a manner to give satisfaction to a great sculptor, and his torso, with its slender waist line, is quite beautiful. On the stage, Nijinsky makes of himself what he will. He can look tall or short, magnificent or ugly, fascinating or repulsive. Like all great interpretative artists, he remoulds himself for his public appearances. It is under the electric light in front of the painted canvas that he becomes a personality, and that personality is governed only by the scenario of the ballet he is representing.

From the day of Nijinsky's arrival, the ensemble of the Ballet improved; somewhat of the spontaneity of the European performances was regained; a good deal of the glamour was recaptured; the loose lines were gathered taut, and the choreography of Fokine (Nijinsky is a director as well as a dancer) was restored to some of its former power. He has appeared in nine rôles in New York during the two short seasons in which he has been seen with the Russian Ballet here; the Slave in *Scheherazade*, Petrouchka, the Rose Ghost, the Faun, the Harlequin in *Carnaval*, Narcisse, Till Eulenspiegel, and the principal male rôles of *La Princesse Enchantée* and *Les Sylphides*. To enjoy the art of Nijinsky completely, to fully appreciate his genius, it is necessary not only to see him in a variety of parts, but also to see him in the same rôle many times.

Study the detail of his performance in *Scheherazade*, for example. Its precision alone is noteworthy. Indeed, precision is a quality we see exposed so seldom in the theatre that when we find it we are almost inclined to hail it as genius. The rôle of the Slave in this ballet is perhaps Nijinsky's scenic masterpiece — exotic eroticism expressed in so high a key that its very existence seems incredible on our puritanic stage, and yet with such great art (the artist always expresses himself with beauty) that the intention is softened by the execution. Before the arrival of this dancer, *Schehera-*

zade had become a police court scandal. There had been talk of a "Jim Crow" performance in which the blacks were to be separated from the whites in the harem, and I am told that our provincial police magistrates even wanted to replace the "mattresses" — so were the divans of the sultanas described in court — by rocking chairs! But to the considerably more vivid *Scheherazade* of Nijinsky no exception was taken. This strange, curious, head-wagging, simian creature, scarce human, wriggled through the play, leaving a long streak of lust and terror in his wake. Never did Nijinsky as the Negro Slave touch the Sultana, but his subtle and sensuous fingers fluttered close to her flesh, clinging once or twice questioningly to a depending tassel. Pierced by the javelins of the Sultan's men, the Slave's death struggle might have been revolting and gruesome. Instead Nijinsky carried the eye rapidly upward with his tapering feet as they balanced for the briefest part of a second straight high in the air, only to fall inert with so brilliantly swift a movement that the aesthetic effect grappled successfully with the feeling of disgust which might have been aroused. This was acting, this was characterization, so completely merged in rhythm that the result became a perfect whole and not a combination of several intentions, as so often results from the work of an actor-dancer.

The heart-breaking Petrouchka, the roguish Harlequin, the Chopinist of *Les Sylphides* — all were offered to our view; and *Narcisse*, in which Nijinsky not only did some very beautiful dancing, but posed (as the Greek youth admired himself in the mirror of the pool) with such utter and arresting grace that even here he awakened a new kind of emotion. In *La Princesse Enchantée* he merely danced, but how he danced! Do you who saw him still remember those flickering fingers and toes? "He winketh with his eyes, he speaketh with his feet, he teacheth with his fingers," is written in the Book of Proverbs, and the writer might have had in mind Nijinsky in *La Princesse Enchantée*. All these parts were differentiated, all completely realized, in the threefold intricacy of this baffling art, which perhaps is not an art at all until it is so realized, when its plastic, rhythmic, and histrionic elements become an entity.

After a summer in Spain and Switzerland without Nijinsky, the Russian Ballet returned to America for a second season, opening at the Manhattan Opera House October 16, 1916. It is always a delight to hear and see performances in this theatre,

and it was found that the brilliance of the Ballet was much enhanced by its new frame. The season, however, opened with a disappointment. It had been announced that Nijinsky would dance on the first night his choreographic version of Richard Strauss's tone-poem, *Till Eulenspiegel*. It is not the first time that a press agent has made a false prophecy. While rehearsing the new work Nijinsky twisted his ankle, and during the first week of the engagement he did not appear at all. This was doubly unfortunate, because the company was weaker than it had been the previous season, lack-

ing both Massine and Tchernicheva. The only novelty (for America) produced during the first week was an arrangement of the divertissement from Rimsky-Korsakow's opera, *Sadko*, which had already been given a few times in Paris and London by the Ballet, never with conspicuous success. The second week of the season, Nijinsky returned to appear in three rôles, the Faun, *Till Eulenspiegel*, and the Slave in *Scheherazade*. Of his performance to Debussy's lovely music I have written elsewhere; nor did this new vision cause me to revise my opinions.



Leonide Massine, Sopha Pflanz and L. Klementowitch : *Soleil de Nuit* (New York : 1916)

Till Eulenspiegel is the only new ballet the Russians have produced in America. (*Soleil de Nuit* was prepared in Europe, and performed once at the Paris Opéra before it was seen in New York. Besides, it was an arrangement of dances from an opera which is frequently given in Russia and which has been presented at the Opéra-Comique in Paris.) The chef d'orchestre, Pierre Monteux, refused to direct performances of this work, on the ground that the composer was not only a German, but a very much alive and active German patriot. On the occasions, therefore, that *Till* was performed in New York, the orchestra struggled along under the baton of Dr. Anselm Goetzl. In selecting this work and in his arrangement of the action Nijinsky was moved, no doubt, by consideration for the limitations of the company as it existed. The scenery and costumes by Robert E. Jones, of New York, were decidedly diverting—the best work this talented young man has done, I think. Over a deep, spreading background of ultramarine, the crazy turrets of mediaeval castles leaned dizzily to and fro. The costumes were exaggerations of the exaggerated fashions of the Middle Ages. Mr. Jones added feet of stature to the already elongated peaked headdresses of the period. The trains of the velvet robes, which might have extended three yards, were allowed to trail the full depth of the Manhattan Opera House stage. The colors were oranges, reds, greens, and blues, those indeed of Bakst's *Scheherazade*, but so differently disposed that they made an entirely dissimilar impression. The effect reminded one spectator of a Spanish omelet.

In arranging the scenario, Nijinsky followed in almost every detail Wilhelm Klatte's description of the meaning of the music, which is printed in programme books whenever the tone-poem is performed, without Strauss's authority, but sometimes with his sanction. Nijinsky was quite justified in altering the end of the work, which hangs the rogue-hero, into another practical joke. His version of this episode fits the music and, in the original *Till Eulenspiegel* stories, Till is not hanged, but dies in bed. The keynote of Nijinsky's interpretation was gaiety. He was as utterly picaresque as the work itself; he reincarnated the spirit of Gil Blas; indeed, a new quality crept into stage expression through this characterization. Margaret Wycherly, one of the most active admirers of the dancer, told me after the first performance that she felt that he had for the first time leaped into the hearts of the

great American public, whose appreciation of his subtler art as expressed in *Narcisse*, *Petrouchka*, and even *Scheherazade*, had been more moderate. There were those who protested that this was not the Till of the German legends, but any actor who attempts to give form to a folk or historical character, or even a character derived from fiction, is forced to run counter to many an observer's preconceived ideas.

"It is an error to believe that pantomime is merely a way of doing without words," writes Arthur Symons, "that it is merely the equivalent of words. Pantomime is thinking overheard. It begins and ends before words have formed themselves, in a deeper consciousness than that of speech. And it addresses itself, by the artful limitations of its craft, to universal human experience, knowing that the moment it departs from those broad lines it will become unintelligible. It risks existence on its own



Lydia Lopoukova : *Petrouchka* (New York : 1916)

perfection, as the rope-dancer does, to whom a false step means a downfall. And it appeals democratically to people of all nations. . . . And pantomime has that mystery which is one of the requirements of true art. To watch it is like dreaming. How silently, in dreams, one gathers the unheard sounds of words from the lips that do but make pretense of saying them! And does not every one know that terrifying impossibility of speaking which fastens one to the ground for the eternity of a second, in what is the new, perhaps truer, computation of time in dreams? Something like that sense of suspense seems to hang over the silent actors in pantomime, giving them a nervous exaltation, which has its subtle, immediate effect upon us, in tragic and comic situation. The silence becomes an atmosphere, and with a very curious power of giving distinction to form and motion. I do not see why people should ever break silence on the stage except to speak poetry. Here, in pantomime, you have a gracious, expressive silence, beauty of gesture, a perfectly discreet appeal to the emotions, a transposition of the world into an elegant accepted convention."

Arthur Symons wrote these words before he had seen the Russian Ballet, before the Russian Ballet, as we know it, existed, indeed, before Nijinsky had begun to dance in public, and he felt that the addition of poetry and music to pantomime — the Wagner music-drama in other words — brought about a perfect combination of the arts. Nevertheless, there is an obvious application of his remarks to the present instance. There is indeed, the quality of a dream about the characters Nijinsky presents to us. I remember once, at a performance of the Russian Ballet, I sat in a box next to a most intelligent man, a writer himself; I was meeting him for the first time, and he was seeing the Ballet for the first time. Before the curtain rose he had told me that dancing and pantomime were very pretty to look at, but that he found no stimulation in watching them, no mental and spiritual exaltation, such as might follow a performance of *Hamlet*. Having seen Nijinsky, I could not agree with him — and this indifferent observer became that evening himself a fervent disciple of the Ballet. For Nijinsky gave him, he found, just what his ideal performance of Shakespeare's play might have given him, a basis for dreams, for thinking, for poetry. The ennobling effect of all great and perfect art, after the primary emotion, seems to be to set our minds wandering in a thousand channels, to suggest new outlets. Pater's experience before the *Mona Lisa* is only unique in its intense and direct expression.

No writer, no musician, no painter, can feel deep emotion before a work of art without expressing it in some way, although the expression may be a thousand leagues removed from the inspiration. And how few of us can view the art of Nijinsky without emotion! To the painter he gives a new sense of proportion, to the musician a new sense of rhythm, while to the writer he must perforce immediately suggest new words; better still, new meanings for old words. Dance, pantomime, acting, harmony, all these divest themselves of their worn-out accoutrements and appear, as if clothed by magic, in garments of unheard-of novelty; hue, texture, cut, and workmanship are all a surprise to us. We look enraptured, we go away enthralled, and perhaps even unconsciously a new quality creeps into our own work. It is the same glamour cast over us by contemplation of the Campo Santo at Pisa, or the Roman Theatre at Orange, or the Cathedral at Chartres — the inspiration for one of the most word-jewelled books in any language — or the New York sky-line at twilight as one sails away into the harbor, or a great iron crane which lifts tons of alien matter in its gaping jaw. Great music can give us this feeling, the symphonies of Beethoven, Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Schubert's C major symphony, or César Franck's D minor, *The Sacrifice to the Spring* of Strawinsky, *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* of Debussy, Chabrier's Rhapsody, *España*; great interpretative musicians can give it to us, Ysaie at his best, Paderewski, Marcella Sembrich in song recital; but how few artists on the stage suggest even as much as the often paltry lines of the author, the often banal music of the composer! There is an *au delà* to all great interpretative art, something that remains after story, words, picture, and gesture have faded vaguely into that storeroom in our memories where are concealed these lovely ghosts of ephemeral beauty, and the artist who is able to give us this is blessed even beyond his knowledge, for to him has been vouchsafed the sacred kiss of the gods. This quality cannot be acquired, it cannot even be described, but it can be felt. With its beneficent aid the interpreter not only contributes to our pleasure, he broadens our horizon, adds to our knowledge and capacity for feeling.

As I read over these notes I realize that I have not been able to discover flaws in the art of this young man. It seems to me that in his chosen medium he approaches perfection. What he attempts to do, he always does perfectly. Can one say as much for any other interpreter? But it is a difficult matter to give the spirit of Nijinsky, to describe

his art on paper, to capture the abundant grace, the measureless poetry, the infinite illusion of his captivating motion in ink. Who can hope to do it? Future generations must take our word for his greatness. We can do little more than call it that.

(From "Interpreters," Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1917)

The New Isadora

I have a fine memory of a chance description flung off by some one at a dinner in Paris; a picture of the youthful Isadora Duncan in her studio in New York developing her ideals through sheer will and preserving the contour of her feet by wearing carpet slippers. The latter detail stuck in my memory. It may or may not be true, but it could have been, *should* have been true. The incipient dancer keeping her feet pure for her coming marriage with her art is a subject for philosophic dissertation or for poetry. There are many poets who would have seized on this idea for an ode or even a sonnet, had it occurred to them. Oscar Wilde would have liked this excuse for a poem . . . even Robert Browning, who would have woven many moral strophes from this text. . . It would have furnished Mr. George Moore with material for another story of the volume called *Celibates*. Walter Pater might have dived into some very beautiful, but very conscious, prose with this theme as a spring-board. Huysmans would have found this suggestion sufficient inspiration for a romance the length of *Clarissa Harlowe*. You will remember that the author of *En Route* meditated writing a novel about a man who left his house to go to his office. Perceiving that his shoes have not been polished, he stops at a boot-black's and during the operation he reviews his affairs. The problem was to make 300 pages of this! . . . Lombroso would have added the detail to his long catalogue in *The Man of Genius* as another proof of the insanity of artists. Georges Feydeau would have found therein enough matter for a three-act farce and d'Annunzio for a poetic drama which he might have dedicated to "Isadora of the beautiful feet." Sermons might be preached from the text and many painters would touch the subject with reverence. Manet might have painted Isadora with one of the carpet slippers half depending from a bare, rosy-white foot.

There are many fables concerning the beginning of Isadora's career. One has it that the original dance in bare feet was an accident. . . Isadora was laving her feet in an upper chamber when her

I shall have served my purpose if I have succeeded in this humble article in bringing back to those who have seen him a flashing glimpse of the imaginative actuality.

January 16, 1917

hostess begged her to dance for her other guests. Just as she was she descended and met with such approval that thenceforth her feet remained bare. This is a pretty tale, but it has not the fine ring of truth of the story of the carpet slippers. There had been barefoot dancers before Isadora; there had been, I venture to say, distinct "Greek dancers." Isadora's contribution to her art is spiritual; it is her feeling for the idea of the dance which isolates her from her contemporaries. Many have overlooked this essential fact in attempting to account for her obvious importance. Her imitators (and has any other interpretative artist ever had so many?) have purloined her costumes, her gestures, her steps; they have put the music of Beethoven and Schubert to new uses as she had done before them; they have unbound their hair and freed their feet; but the essence of her art, the spirit, they have left in her keeping; they could not well do otherwise.

Inspired perhaps by Greek phrases, by the superb collection of Greek vases in the old Pinakothek in Munich, Isadora cast the knowledge she had gleaned of the dancer's training from her. At least she forced it to be subservient to her new wishes. She flung aside her memory of the *entrechat* and the *pirouette*, the studied technique of the ballet; but in so doing she unveiled her own soul. She called her art the renaissance of the Greek ideal but there was something modern about it, pagan though it might be in quality. Always it was pure and sexless . . . always abstract emotion has guided her interpretations.

In the beginning she danced to the piano music of Chopin and Schubert. Eleven years ago I saw her in Munich in a program of Schubert impromptus and Chopin preludes and mazurkas. A year or two later she was dancing in Paris to the accompaniment of the Colonne Orchestra, a good deal of the music of Gluck's *Orfeo* and the very lovely dances from *Iphigénie en Aulide*. In these she remained faithful to her original ideal, the

(Opposite : *La Marseillaise* : Genthe)



beauty of abstract movement, the rhythm of exquisite gesture. This was not sense echoing sound but rather a very delightful confusion of her own mood with that of the music.

So a new grace, a new freedom were added to the dance; in her later representations she has added a third quality, strength. Too, her immediate interpretations often suggest concrete images. . . A passionate patriotism for one of her adopted countries is at the root of her fiery miming of the *Marseillaise*, a patriotism apparently as deep-rooted, certainly as inflaming, as that which inspired Rachel in her recitation of this hymn during the Paris revolution of 1848. In times of civil or international conflagration the dancer, the actress often play important rôles in world politics. Malvina Cavalazzi, the Italian ballerina who appeared at the Academy of Music during the Eighties and who married Charles Mapleson, son of the impresario, once told me of a part she had played in the making of United Italy. During the Austrian invasion the Italian flag was *verboten*. One night, however, during a representation of opera in a town the name of which I have forgotten, Mme. Cavalazzi wore a costume of green and white, while her male companion wore red, so that in the *pas de deux* which concluded the ballet they formed automatically a semblance of the Italian banner. The audience was raised to a hysterical pitch of enthusiasm and rushed from the theatre in a violent mood, which resulted in an immediate encounter with the Austrians and their eventual expulsion from the city.

Isadora's pantomimic interpretation of the *Marseillaise*, given in New York before the United States had entered the world war, aroused as vehement and excited an expression of enthusiasm as it would be possible for an artist to awaken in our theatre today. The audience stood up and scarcely restrained their impatience to cheer. At the previous performances in Paris, I am told, the effect approached the incredible. . . In a robe the color of blood she stands enfolded; she sees the enemy advance; she feels the enemy as it grasps her by the throat; she kisses her flag; she tastes blood; she is all but crushed under the weight of the attack; and then she rises, triumphant, with the terrible cry, *Aux armes, citoyens!* Part of her effect is gained by gesture, part by the massing of her body, but the greater part by facial expression. In the anguished appeal she does not make a sound, beyond that made by the orchestra, but the hideous din of a hundred raucous voices seems to ring in

our ears. We see Félicien Rops's *Vengeance* come to life; we see the *sans-culottes* following the carts of the aristocrats on the way to execution . . . and finally we see the superb calm, the majestic flowing strength of the Victory of Samothrace. . . At times, legs, arms, a leg or an arm, the throat, or the exposed breast assume an importance above that of the rest of the mass, suggesting the unfinished sculpture of Michael Angelo, an apopsiopsis which, of course, served as Rodin's inspiration.

In the *Marche Slave* of Tchaikovsky Isadora symbolizes her conception of the Russian moujik rising from slavery to freedom. With her hands bound behind her back, groping, stumbling, head bowed, knees bent, she struggles forward, clad only in a short red garment that barely covers her thighs. With furtive glances of extreme despair she peers above and ahead. When the strains of *God Save the Czar* are first heard in the orchestra she falls to her knees and you see the peasant shuddering under the blows of the knout. The picture is a tragic one, cumulative in its horrific details. Finally comes the moment of release and here Isadora makes one of her great effects. She does not spread her arms apart with a wide gesture. She brings them forward slowly and we observe with horror that they have practically forgotten how to move at all. They are crushed, these hands, crushed and bleeding after their long serfdom; they are not hands at all but claws, broken, twisted piteous claws! The expression of frightened, almost uncomprehending, joy with which Isadora concludes the march is another stroke of her vivid imaginative genius.

In her third number inspired by the Great War, the *Marche Lorraine* of Louis Ganne, in which is incorporated the celebrated *Chanson Lorraine*, Isadora with her pupils, symbolizes the gaiety of the martial spirit. It is the spirit of the cavalry riding gallantly with banners waving in the wind; the infantry marching to an inspired tune. There is nothing of the horror of war or revolution in this picture . . . only the brilliancy and dash of war . . . the power and the glory!

Of late years Isadora has danced (in the conventional meaning of the word) less and less. Since her performance at Carnegie Hall several years ago of the *Liebestod* from *Tristan*, which Walter Damrosch hailed as an extremely interesting experiment, she has attempted to express something more than the joy of melody and rhythm. Indeed on at least three occasions she has performed a Requiem at the

Metropolitan Opera House. . . If the new art at its best is not dancing, neither is it wholly allied to the art of pantomime. It would seem, indeed, that Isadora is attempting to express something of the spirit of sculpture, perhaps what Vachell Lindsay describes as "moving sculpture." Her medium, of necessity, is still rhythmic gesture, but its development seems almost dream-like. More than the dance this new art partakes of the fluid and unending quality of music. Like any other new art it is not to be understood at first and I confess in the beginning it said nothing to me, but eventually I began to take pleasure in watching it. Now Isadora's poetic and imaginative interpretation of the symphonic interlude from César Franck's *Rédemption* is full of beauty and meaning to me and during the whole course of its performance the interpreter scarcely rises from her knees. The neck, the throat, the shoulders, the head and arms are her means of expression. I thought of Barbey d'Aurevilly's phrase, "Elle avait l'air de monter vers Dieu les mains toutes pleines de bonnes oeuvres."

Isadora's teaching has had its results but her influence has been wider in other directions. Fokine thanks her for the new Russian Ballet. She did indeed free the Russians from the conventions of the classic ballet and but for her it is doubtful if we should have seen *Scheherazade* and *Cléopâtre*. *Daphnis et Chloë*, *Narcisse* and *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* bear her direct stamp. This then, aside from her own appearances, has been her great work. Of her celebrated school of dancing I cannot speak with so much enthusiasm. The defect in her method of teaching is her insistence (consciously or unconsciously) on herself as a model. The seven remaining girls of her school dance delightfully.

They are, in addition, young and beautiful, but they are miniature Isadoras. They add nothing to her style; they make the same gestures; they take the same steps; they have almost, if not quite, acquired a semblance of her spirit. They vibrate with intention; they have force, but constantly they suggest just what they are . . . imitations. When they dance alone they often make a very charming but scarcely overpowering effect. When they dance with Isadora they are but a moving row of shadow shapes of Isadora that come and go. Her own presence suffices to make the effect they all make together. . . I have been told that when Isadora watches her girls dance she often weeps, for then and then only she can behold herself. One of the griefs of an actor or a dancer is that he can never see himself. This oversight of nature Isadora has to some extent overcome.

Those who like to see pretty dancing, pretty girls, pretty things in general will not find much pleasure in contemplating the art of Isadora. She is not pretty; her dancing is not pretty. She has been cast in nobler mould and it is her pleasure to climb higher mountains. Her gesture is titanic; her mood generally one of imperious grandeur. She has grown larger with the years — and by this I mean something more than the physical interpretation of the word, for she is indeed heroic in build. But this is the secret of her power and force. There is no suggestion of flabbiness about her and so she can impart to us the soul of the struggling moujik, the spirit of a nation, the figure on the prow of a Greek bark. . . And when she interprets the *Marseillaise* she seems indeed to feel the mighty moment.

July 14, 1917

(From "The Merry-Go-Round," Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1918)

• *The Land of Joy*

A few nights ago a Spanish company, unheralded, unsung, indeed almost unwelcomed by such reviewers as had to trudge to the out-of-the-way Park Theatre, came to New York, in a musical revue entitled *The Land of Joy*. The score was written by Joaquín Valverde, *fils*, whose music is not unknown to us, and the company included La Argentina, a Spanish dancer who had given matinees here in a past season without arousing more than mild enthusiasm. The theatrical impresarii, the song publishers, and the Broadway rabble stayed away on the first night. It was all very well,

they might have reasoned, to read about the goings-on in Spain, but they would never do in America. Spanish dancers had been imported in the past without awakening undue excitement. Did not the great Carmencita herself visit America twenty or more years ago? These impresarii had ignored the existence of a great psychological (or more properly physiological) truth: you cannot mix Burgundy and Beer! One Spanish dancer surrounded by Americans is just as much lost as the great Nijinsky himself was in an English music hall, where he made a complete and dismal failure. And so they

would have been very much astonished (had they been present) on the opening night to have witnessed all the scenes of uncontrollable enthusiasm — just as they are described by Havelock Ellis, Richard Ford, and Chabrier — repeated. The audience, indeed, became hysterical, and broke into wild cries of *Ole! Ole!* Hats were thrown on the stage. The audience became as abandoned as the players, became a part of the action.

You will find all this described in *The Soul of Spain*, in *Gatherings from Spain*, in Chabrier's letters, and it had all been transplanted to New York almost without a whisper of preparation, which is fortunate, for if it had been expected, doubtless we would have found the way to spoil it. Fancy the average New York first-night audience, stiff and unbending, sceptical and sardonic, welcoming this exhibition! Havelock Ellis gives an ingenious explanation for the fact that Spanish dancing has seldom if ever successfully crossed the border of the Iberian peninsula: "The finest Spanish dancing is at once killed or degraded by the presence of an indifferent or unsympathetic public, and that is probably why it cannot be transplanted, but remains local." Fortunately the Spaniards in the first-night audience gave the cue, unlocked the lips and loosened the hands of us cold Americans. For my part, I was soon yelling *Ole!* louder than anybody else.

The dancer, Dolorettes, is indeed extraordinary. The gipsy fascination, the abandoned, perverse bewitchery of this female devil of the dance is not to be described by mouth, typewriter, or quilled pen. Heine would have put her at the head of his dancing temptresses in his ballet of *Méphistophéla* (found by Lumley too indecent for representation at Her Majesty's Theatre, for which it was written; in spite of which the scenario was published in the respectable *Revue de Deux Mondes*). In this ballet a series of dancing celebrities is exhibited by the female Méphistophélès for the entertainment of her victim. After Salome had twisted her flanks and exploited the prowess of her abdominal muscles to perfunctory applause, Dolorettes would have heated the blood, not only of Faust, but of the ladies and gentlemen in the orchestra stalls, with the clicking of her heels, the clacking of her castanets, now held high over head, now held low behind her back, the flashing of her ivory teeth, the shrill screaming, electric magenta of her smile, the wile of her wriggle, the passion of her performance. And close beside her the sinuous Mazantinita would

flaunt a garish tambourine and wave a shrieking fan. All inanimate objects, shawls, mantillas, combs and cymbals, become inflamed with life, once they are pressed into the service of these señoritas, languorous and forbidding, indifferent and sensuous. Against these rude gipsies the refined grace and Goyaesque elegance of La Argentina stand forth in high relief, La Argentina, in whose hands the castanets become as potent an instrument for our pleasure as the violin does under the fingers of Jascha Heifetz. Bilbao, too, with his thundering heels and his tauromachian gestures, bewilders our highly magnetized senses. When, in the dance, he pursues, without catching, the elusive Dolorettes, it would seem that the limit of dynamic effects in the theatre had been reached.

Here are singers! The limpid and lovely soprano of the comparatively placid Maria Marco, who introduces figurations into the brilliant music she



Dolorettes (New York : 1917)

sings at every turn. One indecent (there is no other word for it) chromatic oriental phrase is so strange that none of us can ever recall it or forget it! And the frantically nervous Luisita Puchol, whose eyelids spring open like the cover of a Jack-in-the-box, and whose hands flutter like saucy butterflies, sings suggestive popular ditties just a shade better than any one else I know of.

But *The Land of Joy* does not rely on one or two principals for its effect. The organization as a whole is as full of fire and purpose as the original Russian Ballet; the costumes themselves, in their blazing, heated colours, constitute the ingredients of an orgy; the music, now sentimental (the adaptability of Valverde, who has lived in Paris, is little short of amazing; there is a vocal waltz in the style of Arditi that Mme. Patti might have introduced into the lesson scene of *Il Barbieri*; there is an-



La Argentina (New York : 1917)

other song in the style of George M. Cohan — these by way of contrast to the Iberian music), now pulsing with rhythmic life, is the best Spanish music we have yet heard in this country. The whole entertainment, music, colors, costumes, songs, dances, and all, is as nicely arranged in its crescendos and decrescendos, its prestos and adagios as a Mozart finale. The close of the first act, in which the ladies sweep the stage with long ruffled trains, suggestive of all the Manet pictures you have ever seen, would seem to be unapproachable, but the most striking costumes and the wildest dancing are reserved for the very last scene of all. There these bewildering señoritas come forth in the splendourous envelope of embroidered Manila shawls, and such shawls! Prehistoric African roses of unbelievable measure decorate a texture of turquoise, from which depends nearly a yard of silken fringe. In others mingle royal purple and buff, orange and white, black and the kaleidoscope! The revue, a sublimated form of *zarzuela*, is calculated, indeed, to hold you in a dangerous state of nervous excitement during the entire evening, to keep you awake for the rest of the night, and to entice you to the theatre the next night and the next. It is as intoxicating as vodka, as insidious as cocaine, and it is likely to become a habit, like these stimulants. I have found, indeed, that it appeals to all classes of taste, from that of a telephone operator, whose usual artistic debauch is the latest antipyretic novel of Robert W. Chambers, to that of the frequenter of the concert halls.

I cannot resist further cataloguing; details shake their fists at my memory; for instance, the intricate rhythms of Valverde's elaborately syncopated music (not at all like ragtime syncopation), the thrilling orchestration (I remember one dance which is accompanied by drum taps and oboe, nothing else!), the utter absence of tangos (which are Argentine), and habañeras (which are Cuban), most of the music being written in two-four and three-four time, and the interesting use of folk-tunes; the casual and very suggestive indifference of the dancers while they are not dancing, seemingly models for a dozen Zuloaga paintings, the apparently inexhaustible skill and variety of these dancers in action, winding ornaments around the melodies with their feet and bodies and arms and heads and castanets as coloratura sopranos do with their voices. Sometimes castanets are not used; cymbals supplant them, or tambourines, or even fingers. Once, by some esoteric witchcraft, the

dancers seemed to tap upon their arms. The effect was so stupendous and terrifying that I could not project myself into that aloof state of mind necessary for a calm dissection of its technique.

What we have been thinking of all these years in accepting the imitation and ignoring the actuality I don't know; it has all been down in black and white. What Richard Ford saw and wrote down in 1846 I am seeing and writing down in 1917. How these devilish Spaniards have been able to keep it up all this time I can't imagine. Here we have our paradox. Spain has changed so little that Ford's book is still the best to be procured on the subject (you may spend many a delightful half-hour with the charming irony of its pages for company). Spanish dancing is apparently what it was a hundred years ago; no wind from the north has dis-

turbed it. Stranger still, it depends for its effect on the acquirement of a brilliant technique. Merely to play the castanets requires a severe tutelage. And yet it is all as spontaneous, as fresh, as unstudied, as vehement in its appeal, even to Spaniards, as it was in the beginning. Let us hope that Spain will have no artistic reawakening.

Aristotle and Havelock Ellis have taught us that the theatre should be an outlet for suppressed desires. So, indeed, the ideal theatre should. As a matter of fact, in most playhouses (I will generously refrain from naming the one I visited yesterday) I am continually suppressing a desire to strangle somebody or other, but after a visit to the Spaniards I walk out into Columbus Circle completely purged of pity and fear, love, hate, and all the rest. It is an experience.

November 3, 1917

(From "The Music of Spain," Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1918)

• *Leo Delibes*

I am tired of the "Six." I am weary of Erik Satie. I am fed up with Malipiero. The music of Zoltan Kodaly has begun to pall on me. I have consigned my Arnold Schönberg scores to the flames and tossed Alfredo Casella into the dust-bin. I have presented such examples of the genius of Poulenc as I possessed to my grocer's daughter and my erstwhile copy of Lord Berner's *Three Little Funeral Marches* is now the property of the policeman on the corner. I am gorged with Ornstein and Prokofieff. De Falla and Strawinsky are anathema to me. Béla Bartók is a neo-zany. I am sick of Greek tunics and bare legs, satiated with oriental dancing, Persian, Javanese, Chinese, and Polovtsian, surfeited with turkey trots and bunny hugs and fox trots, bored with tangos and maxixes, boleros and seguidillas, Argentine and Spanish dances of whatever nature. I have had my fill of "ballroom dancing," cakewalks, pigeon-wings, clogs, jazz, and hoe-downs. Terpsichore has been such a favorite of late, literary, pictorial, musical, and even social, that the muse has become inflatedly self-conscious, afflicted with a bad case of megalomania. Personally, I wave her away. There is, of course, a reason for this reaction, a stimulant for this new litany: in cleaning out an old music cabinet today I stumbled upon the score of *Coppélia*: the distinguished, spirited, singing, luminous, melodies of Delibes rang again in my ears, the eyes of memory focused on

the fluffed tarlatan skirt, the suggestive fleshings terminating in the pointed toe, and quite suddenly, all "modern" music and dancing assumed the quality of fustian.

"Every dance recalls love. Every ballet leaves us sighing with regret," writes André Suarès. "This mad Maenad becomes intoxicated in her own fashion; she burns only with the wine she drinks; she does not aspire to an internal intoxication, that which the vine of the heart opens to the spirit. She has no subjectivity; she is not meditative; she is wholly carnal and voluptuous; she is not even melancholy, her nature is light. Thus, having humbly grasped the hand of music, held music in her arms, the dance betrays music. She asks music for his great heart passionate and tender, of which she makes nothing. She does not even offer music her own heart in return because she has no heart to offer. Like youth, she can only bestow élan and caprice. What is she then, for art and the supreme desire of man, but the most charming body, even if she be bereft of soul?"

The classic costume, the tutu, serves to accentuate this fantastic, carnal quality of the ballet. What fascinations of the imagination it immediately evokes, metamorphosing the dancer into a dragonfly, a great moth, or a flower swaying in the wind, suggestive of nymphs and sylphs and faraway, faded, immortal things! The fluffy tarlatan and the

La Source,
Act One
(from stereo-
scopic photo
of stage
model)
(ca. 1870)



tight bodice emphasize the wasp-waist, the frailty of the arms and legs. Sex is both concealed and awakened. The pointed toe gives the illusion to this mythological creature of an airy defiance of the laws of gravity. She becomes, indeed, a brilliant insect, hovering between heaven and earth. "The ballet," wrote Théophile Gautier in a happy phrase, "is music that one can see." See in a dream, he might have added, for surely there is a sense of unreality about this art, created artificially and consciously by its devotees, which makes it, thanks to its very conventions and limitations, something rich and strange.

Turning the leaves of this crepuscular score, I recall the names of dancers, some of them born and dead before Delibes's day: Marie Taglioni, the glamorous, Fanny Elssler, the saucy, Fanny Cerito, Carlotta Grisi, beloved of Gautier, Rita Sangalli, and Rosita Mauri, who forswore caviar because the Tsar, at one of her representations, turned his

gaze from the stage to converse with his companions. What pictures of pleasant periods are brought before the eye of the mind by the very names of these ladies! And the names of these ladies and other lulling reveries have been awakened in me by a glimpse of a tattered score by Leo Delibes.

The significance of Delibes, albeit he himself assuredly owed something to Auber and Offenbach, in the history of French music is not, perhaps, generally recognized. More frequently, probably, it is entirely ignored. It was an agreeable experience, therefore, to discover a review by Emile Vuillermoz, apropos of a recent Parisian revival of *Le roi l'a dit*, in which the statement is made: "Such works as *Le roi l'a dit* and *Lakmé* have a considerable importance in our musical history. Delibes is the great forerunner of the 'artist-writer' from which our modern school has evolved. It is he who has given to our musicians the taste to dispose the notes of a

chord, the timbre of an orchestration, the voices of an ensemble, with an attentive ingenuity which multiplies discoveries with each measure. His influence, and that of Edouard Lalo, have been decisive on the musicians of our time."

Another debt which music owes to Delibes is not owed exclusively by France; it is an international obligation. Before he began to compose his ballets, music for dancing, for the most part, consisted of tinkle-tinkle melodies with marked rhythm. Dancing in France, and often elsewhere (I am speaking, naturally, only of the ballet) was not deeply expressive in its nature. Its spectators were satisfied with technical feats of virtuosity. Dancers were compared on their respective abilities to execute the *entrechat* and the *pirouette*. Taglioni and Elssler, to be sure, transcended the technical limitations of their art, evolving an imaginative and spirituelle contribution to the dance fully appreciated in early nineteenth century literature. They accomplished

this through their own personalities, aided by the traditional, mystic costume, the garb of their priesthood, which endowed their movements with an element of fantasy. They received meager assistance from the music to which they danced. For these sublime rites, the simplest and most banal tunes, the baldest rhythm, the most threadbare harmony, sufficed. Nay more, music with any true verve or character was repudiated as actually likely to exercise a detrimental effect. It was Delibes who revolutionized this peurile ideal of ballet music, introducing in his scores a symphonic element, a wealth of graceful melody, and a richness of harmonic fibre, based, it is safe to hazard, on a healthy distaste for routine. *Coppélia* and *Sylvia*, then, are the forerunners of such elaborate contemporary scores as Tcherepnine's *Narcisse*, Debussy's *Jeux*, Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloë*, Strauss's *The Legend of Joseph*, and Stravinsky's *Petrouchka*. Beyond any manner of doubt, Delibes is the father of the modern ballet.



La Source,
Act Three
(from stereoscopic photo
of stage
model)
(ca. 1870)

II

Clément-Philibert-Léo Delibes was born on February 21, 1836 at Saint-Germain-du-Val, a village situated in the Sarthe, near La Flèche. The death of his father having left the family without resources, his mother took him to Paris in 1848. He was admitted to the Conservatory, and at his first contest he won the second prize for solfège; the following year (1850), he won the first prize. During this period he was a choir boy at the Madeleine. He studied pianoforte with Le Coupey, organ with Benoist, harmony with Bazin, and advanced composition with Adolphe Adam. In 1853, the latter exerted his influence to secure for his pupil a position as répétiteur at the Théâtre-Lyrique. He also became organist at St. Pierre de Chaillot and elsewhere before his appointment at St.-Jean-St.-François, where he was organist from 1862 to 1871. This appears to have been a traditional occupation with French composers. César Franck, Charles-Marie Widor, and Camille Saint-Saëns were all organists in Paris churches.

Very early in his career, Delibes began to write for the theatre, modestly at first, operettas and opéras-bouffes, which have been forgotten. His first effort appears to have been a piece in one act, *Deux sous de charbon*, produced at the Folies-Nouvelles in 1855. He wrote other operettas for the Kursaal d'Éms, the Bouffes-Parisiens, the Variétés, and the Athénée; *Les deux vieilles gardes* (1856); *l'Omelette à la Follembûche* (1859); *Le serpent à plumes* (1864); *l'Écossais de Chatou* (1869), etc. Two of his one-act light operas, *Monsieur Griffard* (1857) and *Le jardinier et son seigneur* (1863), were written for and produced at the Théâtre-Lyrique. He also composed several choruses and a mass. In 1863, he was engaged as répétiteur at the Opera, and in 1865, second chorus-master, under Victor Massé. In 1865, his cantata, *Alger*, was performed.

Having been commissioned to compose a ballet, *La Source* (performed for the first time, November 12, 1866), in collaboration with Minkus, the Polish musician, his share of the score* proved so melodious and so much more distinguished and original than that of his confrère, that Minkus found himself completely eclipsed. Delibes was next asked to write an interpolation, *Le pas des fleurs*, for a revival of Adolphe Adam's ballet, *Le Corsaire*, on October 21, 1867. His masterpiece, *Coppélia*,

was produced May 25, 1870. His principal songs were published in 1872, the year of his marriage to a daughter of Mme. Denain, an actress of the Comédie Française. These include the celebrated *Les filles de Cadix* and *Bonjour Suzon* (on poems by Alfred de Musset), *Avril* (Remy Belleau), and *Myrto* (Armand Silvestre). *Le roi l'a dit* was produced at the Opéra-Comique, May 24, 1873, and *Sylvia*, at the Opéra, June 14, 1876. *La mort d'Orphée*, a "grand scena," was performed at the Trocadéro concerts in 1878; *Jean de Nivelle*, at the Opéra-Comique, March 8, 1880, and *Lakmé*, at the Opéra-Comique, April 14, 1883. He wrote incidental music for a revival of *Le roi s'amuse* at the Comédie Française, November 22, 1882, and a five-act opera, *Kassya*, on which Massenet put the finishing touches, including the composition of the recitatives, after the composer's death, was performed at the Opéra-Comique, March 21, 1893. For a time, under the name of Eloi Delbès, he contributed musical criticism to the *Gaulois*.

In 1877, Delibes was made a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour. In January 1881, he succeeded Henri Reber, recently deceased, as professor of advanced composition at the Conservatory. In December 1884, he was elected a member of the Institut, succeeding Victor Massé, and in 1889, he was promoted to the grade of officer of the Legion of Honour. He died at Paris, January 16, 1891, and a memoir by E. Guiraud was published in 1892.

III

His operas, constructed according to a formula that was once fashionable, are a little tarnished. *Lakmé*, awakening bizarrely confused memories of Marie Van Zandt, Bessie Abbott, Luisa Tetrazzini, and Maria Barrientos, retains some of its vitality and still remains in the repertory of the Paris Opéra-Comique.* Occasionally, this lyric perversion of "Le mariage de Loti" is given elsewhere so that some florid soprano may warble *The Bell Song*. Pauline L'Allemand was the first New York *Lakmé*; Adelina Patti, the second. The score has the monotony and the clotting languor of the East. After the first act, all souls who are sensitive to suggestion are likely to fall asleep. *Le roi l'a dit* is interesting in its historical aspects; I have already quoted M. Vuillermoz in this regard. I heard *Jean de Nivelle* at the Gaieté-Lyrique at Paris fourteen or fifteen years ago when Arlette was sung by Nicot-Bilbaut-Vauchelet, the daughter of the so-

* The second and third scenes, in this ballet in four scenes, are the work of Delibes.

** And of the Metropolitan Opera House!

prano who created this florid rôle in 1880. This Louis XI lyric drama is Delibes's contribution to Tannhäuserism. Russia, Germany, France, all suffered from this quaint disease.

Saint-Saëns once remarked with contemptuous bitterness: "French criticism has not reproached Delibes for not being a melodist; he has made some operettas." The gift of melody, however, is rare and it is a gift the gods bestowed on Delibes to the partial exclusion of Saint-Saëns. It is not in his operas that this gift may be studied most advantageously, although neither *The Bell Song* nor the *Barcarolle* in *Lakmé* is to be scoffed at. The best pages in the score, however, are those devoted to the ballet, the exotic *Terana*, the *Rektah*, and the Persian dance,* and it is in his music for the ballet generally that Delibes excelled and in which, as has been intimated already, he made certain innovations. Ballet music, heretofore, had been subservient to the dancers, and it was believed, it would seem, that banality was essential to its success. Delibes's ballet music is piquant and picturesque, nervous and brilliant, shot with color and curious instrumental effects, subtle in rhythm; above all, his melody has a highly distinguished line and the texture is symphonic.

Sylvia, ou la nymphe de Diane, created by Rita Sangalli (who ten years later became the Baronne de St.-Pierre) at the Paris Opéra, June 14, 1876, is an evocation today (it has recently been revived) of a period; it is Second Empire classicism,

if you like, but the music remains as *pim pant*, as exhilaratingly fresh as ever. A happy fragrance, a delightfully artificial, if somewhat heartless, charm hovers over this score. Delibes, aware of his limitations, or governed purely by his taste, deliberately excluded the barbaric and the savage from his work. *Les chasseresses*, the *Valse lente*, the *Cortège de Bacchus*, all retain their peculiar seductions, and the pizzicati divertissement of the slave has achieved a world-fame.

Coppélia, ou la fille aux yeux d'émail, is assuredly his masterpiece. From the *Prélude* and the *Valse lente*, to which the adorable Swanilda floats across the scene almost as soon as the curtains part, through the *Csardas*, the *Mazurka*, on to the end of the work, it is a model of concise and witty music, spirited and delicate melody. There are, to be sure, sentimental passages, but on the whole Delibes is less sentimental than Gounod. His tunes usually move at a brisk pace. They have all the lustre of a polka by Offenbach, and something more in the way of glamour. Perusing this old score, I dream again of the languorous delights of the ballet, the real ballet and, for the moment, I am no modern. It has even occurred to me to wonder if any composer gifted with the power to create melody has ever found it necessary to try to create anything else.

* Music employed by Ruth St. Denis in her creation of *Radha*.

May 9, 1922

(From "Excavations," Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1926)

The Lindy Hop

Every decade or so some Negro creates or discovers or stumbles upon a new dance step which so completely strikes the fancy of his race that it spreads like water poured on blotting paper. Such dances are usually performed at first inside and outside of lowly cabins, on levees, or, in big cities, on street corners. Presently, quite automatically, they invade the more modest night-clubs where they are observed with interest by visiting entertainers who, sometimes with important modifications, carry them to a higher low world. This process may require a period of two years or longer for its development. At just about this point the director of a Broadway revue in rehearsal, a hooper, or even a Negro who puts on "routines"

in the big musical shows, deciding that the dance is ready for white consumption, introduces it, frequently with the announcement that he has invented it. Nearly all the dancing now to be seen in our musical shows is of Negro origin, but both critics and public are so ignorant of this fact that the production of a new Negro revue is an excuse for the revival of the hoary old lament that it is a pity the Negro can't create anything for himself, that he is obliged to imitate the white man's revues. This, in brief, has been the history of the Cake-Walk, the Bunny Hug, the Turkey Trot, the Charleston, and the Black Bottom. It will probably be the history of the Lindy Hop.



Lindy Hoppers, sculpture by Richmond Barthé (1937)

The Lindy Hop made its first official appearance in Harlem at a Negro Dance Marathon staged at Manhattan Casino some time in 1928. Executed with brilliant virtuosity by a pair of competitors in this exhibition, it was considered at the time a little too difficult to stand much chance of achieving popular success. The dance grew rapidly in favor, however, until a year later it was possible

(Extract from "Parties" (Chapter XIV, p. 183), Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1930)

to observe an entire ballroom filled with couples devoting themselves to its celebration.

The Lindy Hop consists in a certain dislocation of the rhythm of the Fox Trot, followed by leaps and quivers, hops and jumps, eccentric flinging about of arms and legs, and contortions of the torso only fittingly to be described by the word epileptic. After the fundamental steps of the dance have been published, the performers may consider themselves at liberty to improvise, embroidering the traditional measures with startling variations, as a coloratura singer of the early nineteenth century would embellish the score of a Bellini opera with roulades, runs, and shakes.

To observe the Lindy Hop being performed at first induces gooseflesh, and second, intense excitement, akin to religious mania, for the dance is not of sexual derivation, nor does it incline its hierophants towards pleasures of the flesh. Rather it is the celebration of a rite in which glorification of self plays the principal part, a kind of terpsichorean megalomania. It is danced, to be sure, by couples, but the individuals who compose these couples barely touch each other, bodily speaking, during its performance, and each may dance alone, if he feels the urge or is impelled to by his partner. It is Dionysian, if you like, a dance to do honor to wine-drinking, but it is not erotic. Of all the dances originated by the American Negro, this the most nearly approaches the sensation of religious ecstasy. It could be danced, quite reasonably, and without alteration of tempo, to many passages in the *Sacre du Printemps* of Strawinsky, and the Lindy Hop would be as appropriate for the music, which depicts in tone the representation of certain pagan rites, as the music would be appropriate for the Lindy Hop.

Anna Pavlova

It may seem a little unprecise to describe a personality so vivid as that of Anna Pavlova as old-fashioned. Yet she is old-fashioned, in the delightful sense of that epithet; not old-fashioned like things of the day before yesterday, the slang of 1910, the bicycle, or "ballroom dancing," but like the lambrequins, wax-flowers, shell-baskets, glazed chintzes, and mezzotints of our grandmothers, which the Baron de Meyer has so pleasantly revived.

She is the last of the great school of classic dancers, a fragrant reminiscence of the early nineteenth century, born of the same tradition as Taglioni and Fanny Elssler and Carlotta Grisi, and as great as these, perhaps greater than these. With the modern movement in dancing, with which she mistakenly allied herself at one time in her career, she has nothing whatever to do. Save in such a divertissement as *Les Sylphides*, she was entirely

out of place in the Russian Ballet, into which the more nearly contemporary art of Karsavina fitted so neatly. Even less appropriately can Pavlowa be identified with Isadora Duncan and the so-called revival of the dances of the Greeks. The Russian has, to be sure, assumed character rôles, but she is only supreme as the exponent of the classic ballet in works like *Coppélia*, in the true Italian tradition, or Adolphe Adam's *Giselle*. In Glazunoff's *Bacchanale*, which she and Mordkin performed with so much abandon, she may have appeared to commit herself to the new freedom, but it was to be observed that even in this number she preserved the conventions of the classic school by wearing tights and ballet-slippers.

Her only rival in coeval choreographic history, Adeline Genée, a far inferior performer, was prac-

tically vanquished from the day that Pavlowa first set foot on the London stage. Genée, who had enjoyed her hour, was roguish, witty, twinkling, and saucy,* but the Scandinavian not only lacked the finished technique of the Russian, she also wanted her tragic grace. For the mask of Pavlowa is truly tragic, a face of haunting intensity and hurt loveliness. It may be that with her passing the school of toe-dancing will also pass, but it may also be remarked that nothing dies so long as any one is great enough to keep it alive.

* Saucy is a word that has almost fallen into disuse because no new girls are born to fit it. Perhaps Marie Tempest was the last. She was saucy. Another epithet, piquant, frequently applied to *sauces* for steaks, might with equal justice be applied to her.

October 7, 1920

(Extract from "Pastiches et Pistaches," The Reviewer, January 1924: Richmond, Va.)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The republication of these articles has been made possible by the courtesy of their original publishers, Alfred A. Knopf, G. Schirmer, Inc., and the New York Times, respectively, to whom gratitude is sincerely extended. Illustrations have been lent chiefly by the Dance Archives of the Museum of Modern Art, both out of Mr. Van Vechten's collection which it now owns and from other material in its possession. Personal thanks are due to Sidney Edison of the Archives for his interested cooperation in searching out photographs, to Robert W. Hill of the Manuscript Division of the New York Public Library for making available Mr. Van Vechten's scrapbooks even after they had been packed for wartime evacuation from the city, to Edward Simoncic of the New York Times for tracking down and transcribing material from old volumes of that paper, and of course in largest measure to Mr. Van Vechten himself without whose interest the project could never have been undertaken.

J. M.